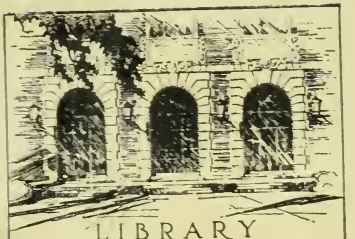

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THE

VICAR'S COURTSHIP.

VOL. III.

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THE

VICAR'S COURTSHIP.

BY

WALTER THORNBURY.

O zarte Sehnsucht, süsses Hoffen,
Der ersten Liebe goldne Zeit,
Das Auge sieht den Himmel offen,
Es schwelgt das Herz in Seligkeit—
O, dass sie ewig grünen bliebe
Die schöne Zeit der jungen Liebe!

SCHILLER'S *Lied von der Glocke.*

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE VICAR'S COURTSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

TEA AT MISS CHIVERS'S.

Perhaps under the circumstances, Beauflower and Amy might be pardoned for walking rather slowly across the meadows to Fontford. Love had given a new heaven and a new earth to them; the stars shone larger, the balmy odours of the summer evening blew sweeter, the nightingale's song now fell upon their ears more supernaturally beautiful and human. Their great happiness transformed all they heard and saw to still more beautiful forms and sounds.

Julia, who met them at the gate with Miss Chivers, was rather cruel when they first arrived, about the exactitude necessary in architectural drawing, and grew still more terribly like Beatrice when, rather to Beauflower's dismay, and much to

Amy's horror, it was found that the drawing had actually after all been left behind in the porch. The Vicar took the matter, however, bravely upon himself, rallied himself for his carelessness, and his love of talking and "spouting" poetry, and gallantly offered to run at once for it; but no one would listen to him, and the matter was at last compromised by the doctor's boy, who had medicine to take to Stoat's Nest, being told to bring it as he came back, for as the moon by that time would have arisen it would not be difficult for him to find it.

"Don't you think, Ned," said Julia, "the ruin by moonlight would make a beautiful sketch? Pity you and Amy didn't wait for the moon."

"You be quiet, you mischief! You can't draw yourself, and you don't understand other people's enthusiasm," said Miss Chivers. "Well, I'm so glad to see you, Amy darling, and even Mr. Beauflower too, though he did run away from me the other day at the waterfall. Oh! that dreadful damp meadow, Amy dear, I've had the rheumatism ever since, been hardly able to move; but Mary's nursed me so kindly that I began to get about yesterday."

"Now you two hardy people must come and help us with the hay before you have one drop of tea," said Julia, despotically; "we are all hard

at work, ain't we, Miss Chivers? getting it in in case of rain to-night, for the glass is falling, the doctor says."

"Yes; and I'm sure it is, by my rheumatism, Julia," said Miss Chivers.

"Oh! it's such fun, Amy; that wonderful major is loading the cart, and telling us how they cut grass in South America, and how he once mowed a prairie of ten thousand acres for a wager with an Indian chief; and your papa and mamma are both helping, and the doctor and Mr. Goodrick, —and laughing—just hear them now! They're all mad together, I'm quite ill with laughing."

Just as Julia spoke there came a roar of laughter from the meadow, the major shouting some wild Irish song, was tossing about the hay like a madman, the self-elected monarch of the whole business. There he was in his shirt sleeves on the top of a waggon, a colossal genius of agriculture, heedless for the time of all lesser troubles, and even of the Charlemagne Champagne.

> "We are the boys for bewitching them,
> Whether good-humoured or coy."

he cried. "Fork up some more hay, doctor; more power to your elbow. Don't give me as little at a time as if you were sorting simples. Good evening, Miss Amy, you're welcome as the

flowers in May; and good evening, Mr. Beauflower, we want the strong arm of the Church here to give us a blessing for the stack! But, look there, that's what ruins us. It is the full of the moon, I suppose." (Here the incorrigible major drew attention to a distant hay-cock near which pretty little Susan, the Robinsons' maid-servant, was talking very earnestly to Mr. Bassevi's smart young man, who, having brought some picture-frames down for Mr. Robinson, had been pressed into the service of the energetic major.) "Look sharp there, or we shan't get tea this side twelve o'clock. Some more hay if you please, Mr. Robinson. Doctor, be kind enough to drive the cart on a little further; somebody hurry those lazy spalpeens with the tarpaulin; and Miss Chivers will put the kettle on for us, and get us some tay hissing hot, for tay's the coolest thing out when a man's tired. Jee-up, Dobbin! You boy, go to that horse's head."

It was a pretty sight, the little comedy of work, with the amateur hay-makers raking away at the odorous meadow as if they were combing a giant's hair. The major was shouting directions like a generalissimo, at once Stentor and Bombastes, and everybody was as busy under the rising moon as if life depended upon it, while Mr. Goodrick, Miss Beauflower, Miss Robinson,

and the Misses Chivers, whilst tea was steeping and muffins preparing, surveyed them from the open glass doors of the drawing-room, round which countless roses crowded as if claiming a right to admission to the snug little party. The trees were still as if they were asleep, and a deep-toned after-glow rested on the Terrace, where the keeper's hut could be seen, a dark speck against the serried lines of fir trees.

Julia was still remorseless. She had no idea of love being a secret and sacred thing.

"You and Amy," she said to her brother, who kept near to Amy's side, and raked back all the hay she was trying to bring nearer to the waggon, "are so slow; you are always lingering behind. You have got some secret between you you won't tell me, and I insist on knowing it. Please, major, tell these lazy people to do their work quicker."

"We can't expect every one to earn their wages like you, Miss Beauflower," said the major, descending from his altitude.

In about half an hour the hay was fairly got into one rough stack, and the tarpaulin drawn over it like a night-cap. The major thereupon sang "Limerick Races," with a chorus which he insisted every one should join in, personally distributed cyder, furnished by Miss Chivers, and then

everyone adjourned to tea. While Amy and Julia were taking off their things, the good-natured doctor, putting on his coat with the air of a satisfied workman, took the Vicar's arm and walked towards the house.

"It's worse and worse at Stoat's Nest," he said, "two more people and another child dead last night; yet Travers will do nothing, not even white-wash, and Harker won't remove the pig-sties or do anything for them. He was too busy about the election to see me when I called this morning, and he says, I hear, that if he pulls down the houses he won't build them up again, not if his men have to walk six miles to their work. He will not increase the rates another penny. Oh! he's as hard as a grindstone."

"It's too bad," said the Vicar, with generous warmth. "Oh, these landlords! they'll have a cruel account to render for all these things. They will not see that property has other duties than merely to receive rents and breed game."

"Now, I think, Miss Chivers," said the major, as he helped to hand round the tea and cake in a grand manner, aided by the other gentlemen, "that we have done a very fair afternoon's work. I don't think I have worked steadier since I went up Chimborazo with a scientific party sent by the Nicaragua government."

"I'm sure I and my sister are extremely obliged to you, major. Amy, darling, do try some of these arrowroot cakes. Mary prides herself on her arrowroot cakes."

"I can highly recommend them," said Mr. Goodrick.

"Mr. Robinson, I beg your pardon, tea or coffee?" said Miss Chivers; for Robinson was intent on admiring a fine bit of Wedgewood on the mantelpiece to which Mr. Goodrick had drawn his and Julia Beauflower's attention.

"Oh! it is so beautiful," said Julia; "do look Amy. Miss Chivers is so kind, she's put out all her treasures. But I must first ask Mr. Goodrick if I ought to admire it. We daren't admire anything at home now, Amy, you know, without permission."

Amy thought it very beautiful.

"It is so crisp," she said, "and the little cameos are finished with such exquisite purity of taste."

"Now, that is sensible criticism, Miss Julia!" said Mr. Goodrick, smiling approval at Amy, and glancing with good-natured sarcasm at his fair persecutor from the Vicarage.

"That is to make me jealous and hate Amy. He is always, Mrs. Robinson, asking me to join in praising Amy, to try and rouse me to some

malicious detraction; but I always carry it further, and that enrages Mr. Goodrick."

"Now, I appeal to Miss Chivers—Miss Elizabeth and Miss Mary Chivers—if that isn't the very essence of the feminine malice of a girl of the period," protested Mr. Goodrick; "that is this clever young lady's way of confessing that hearing a friend praised gives her pain."

"Oh! I'm sure it does not," said Amy, with sweet and unaffected generosity.

"And I'm sure it does not," said Mrs. Robinson.

"Oh! they will always be sparring—those two," said Dr. Briscoe. "May I ask for one more cup of tea, without robbing any one? I'm rather tired with my work; ain't you, Mr. Robinson?"

"Well, I must confess, Dr. Briscoe, I am," said the artist, rubbing his flaccid little arm; "I'm not much accustomed to hard work. I had a pair of dumb-bells once, but a servant we hired stole them. You remember that horrid Irish woman, Flaherty?"

Mrs. Robinson said she did. The wretch was recommended by the major.

"Devil a bit, Mrs. Robinson! Ma'am," said the major, "she was the wife of a compositor who lodged over me in the Blackfriars Road—a drunken baste who beat her, and at last ran away. I told her name to you out of compas-

sion, because she was from Galway, like myself. Recommended her, is it?—get out of that. That's all one gets for doing a kind action. Many's the time I've sworn never to do another."

"Some more tea, Mr. Beauflower? And will you pass Amy's cup?"

"No more for me, Miss Chivers, thank you. Miss Robinson, shall I pass your cup? Miss Chivers, half a cup for Miss Robinson, please."

"And when does this much talked-of election take place at Bibury?" said Mrs. Beauflower, who had been relating to Mrs. Robinson thirty years' experience of Wiltshire servants. Mrs. Robinson was a good listener, and Mrs. Beauflower secretly pronounced her "a delightful and well-bred person,"—considering her station.

"On Thursday," said Dr. Briscoe. "Mr. Paradise, a rich brewer, of Salisbury, is the Radical candidate; but he has no great chance if young Cantelupe plays his cards as well as he has begun to do. His address was so excellent that I very much suspect some one, not a thousand miles from here, had some hand in that."

Beauflower slightly coloured at this lunge, but made no reply; and Julia also slightly coloured, for which latter rosyness there was certainly no necessity.

"Am I right?" said the doctor. "Ah! you don't deny it. The prisoner at the bar is guilty. Well, Beauflower, it was a first-class address—no clap-trap or flummery. I don't go quite so far, you know, as you do, but still I admire the tone. No sneaking evasions—all clear as day!"

"But, after all, I suppose," said Mr. Goodrick, "money is the best argument. Most sovereigns, most votes, swill the brave enlightened voters with perpetual beer, buy them at their own price, flatter them with fulsome praise, cringe and bow and scrape, prove to them you'll support the abuses by which they live, and vote for taxes that will not touch them, and they'll lift you on their greasy shoulders and hail you Member for Bibury—is that the way?"

There was a moment's silence, and a piece of gaseous coal gave a sort of deprecating whiffling answer, like the feeble voice of an old man, which created a laugh.

"You are too hard on our glorious Constitution, with its many conventions, compromises, and imperfections," said the Vicar; "increased education will give poor men in time a higher sense of their duties as voters, especially when they shall have the ballot to protect them."

"Never! Education never will properly extend till it is made compulsory."

"Now, gentlemen," said Miss Chivers, you must not—you must not—begin politics, or we'll discuss women's rights to vote, won't we, Julia?"

"It seems, at present," said Goodrick, "the English woman's very laudable desire to unsex herself, and to become a third-rate sort of man. Women were not sent to be kings and doctors, Shaksperes, Newtons, or Beethovens, even if they could be—they were sent to love and to be loved."

"Yes, we want to be wise and to govern," said Julia, proudly; "don't we Amy?"

"You *do* want to be wise—you *do* want to govern!" said Goodrick, bitterly.

"For Heaven's sake become anything but Dr. Mary Walkers!" said Dr. Briscoe.

"Doctor, that is professional jealousy," said Julia, battling her best.

"We will not have politics or philosophy here," said Miss Chivers. "Look here, dears—look here, Julia: suppose you were king to-day, to-morrow you'd fall in love with your prime minister, and give up the crown as a betrothal present, wouldn't she, Mr. Beauflower? But we mustn't have any more grand talk. Look here, Mary's got a beautiful piece of work here to show you—a lizard all made in ten-stitch by one of my great aunts, who was a nun in France."

Amy and Julia were in a moment absorbed in

this masterpiece of useless industry—the strongest testimony possible of the wasted, wearisome, regretful life those poor involuntary vestals fret away in convents. Poor Mary, who was so deaf that it was impossible for her to join in general conversation, was delighted at the pleasure the work caused, and produced, to reward the spectators, some fine coffee-coloured old rose point lace, and some curious formal houses and landscapes in old Dutch needlework, with little flesh-coloured Cupids playing in the foreground with peacocks, whose plumes shone with golden, green, and purple lustres, not even yet faded. The gentlemen soon got tired of these, and to amuse them Mr. Goodrick very opportunely produced a very fine microscope, with specimens of almost invisible sea shells,—mere pointed and circled dust,—but which, magnified, turned into enamelled cones of ivory and porcelain, jewelled in bars and stripes and zones of varying and endless beauty.

"And all this to rest in miles of sand," said Beauflower, "fathoms under the waves! How generous Nature is!"

Then, at Amy's desire, Mr. Goodrick, who treated her with the love of a father and the devotion of a lover, both softened by the high courtesy of the old school, but a courtesy in him neither cold nor angular, produced several of those

special treasures, which he generally carried with him; the great blue diamond that shone with such matchless lustre, and the opal, that was all in a flicker with green and orange fire, and cloudy gleams of summer daybreak.

"Oh, they are too valuable to carry about," said Miss Chivers, and everyone agreed with her.

"If I had such things, I'd have a whole regiment round me, bedad," said the major; "there are thousands of fellows in London who'd cut a man's throat for the mere filings of such sparklers. I wouldn't undertake to carry those gems through Whitechapel unless I had them in an iron safe, and sat upon it with a blunderbuss in each hand. Talk of Italy, why there's plenty of boys in London would kill a man for a penny roll."

"Now, ladies and gentlemen, it is half-past nine," said Miss Chivers, who, when she forgot her personal aches and pains (which with persons, however unselfish, who live too much alone become matters that occupy far too much of their conversation) was delightfully alert, vivacious, and social, "I propose we have a rubber; we can have two tables. Doctor, I know you like a rubber, and so does Mr. Beauflower. We'll cut for partners. Julia, if you're my partner, don't talk to Mr. Goodrick. Come, come; Amy, dear, ring the bell, please, for the cards."

The pretty little buhl tables were brought and opened; the bright speckled cards, with their inviting red, black, and white pips, were strewn on the bright green cloth, shuffled and made. Mr. Goodrick at one table, and Dr. Briscoe at the other, were just solemnly lifting their cards, when there came a clashing, tearing, frantic ring at the garden bell, that almost tore it out by the roots, a shout for Dr. Briscoe, and a scream from the servant girl. The next moment George rushed in, pale and gaunt.

"Dr. Briscoe! Master, sir! There's been murder done, sir. Come over to Summerleas. Mr. Travers has been shot by poachers on the Terrace. It's murder. They want you to see the body. It's murder. Oh, gracious God, sir, make haste! You can take my horse I've ridden over. Oh, dear, dear!"

The doctor hurried from the room without a word. The next moment his horse's hoofs were heard ringing fast down the road.

The Vicar, with one whisper to Amy to wait till he returned for her, and just a word to his mother and Julia to quiet their fears, also hurried off to run over and see if he could be of any service to the poor widow.

CHAPTER II.

THE INQUEST.

A CROWD of scared looking people had gathered round the door of the Peal of Bells,—farmers, keepers, shepherds, grooms, ostlers, and gentlemen's servants,—all discussing the one topic that had convulsed full one-half of Wiltshire, and had for the time effaced all thoughts even of the Bibury election. Most of them were surrounding Paddy Blake, who was the lion of the day, and upon whom P.C. Archer, with more suspicion of virtue than ever, kept a steady and mistrustful eye. There were wild stories current that Travers had shot himself, having lost money by some bank; that he had been killed by a discharged keeper; that he had been murdered by a footman whom he had induced Mr. Harker to turn away for gambling with the grooms. There were rumours of tramps pedlars, gipsies, and rat-catchers, all of whom were alternately mixed up in the horrible affair by the lively imagination of people of

shallow brains little accustomed to analyse the laws of evidence. Everyone had a different version of the event; one said Travers lived an hour after he was shot, and had disclosed the murderer; another, that when found he had been dead hours; a third, that six guns were heard on the Terrace; a fourth, that three men had been seen lurking near the hut. The murderer was arrested, said some; others declared he had been seen at the Slobury station; and one carter boldly asserted he had been found hanging in Swallowcliff Woods that very morning. P.C. Vincent smiled grimly at some of these assertions, sneered at others; but expressed no opinion himself. He was close as an iron safe and silent as death.

At every door in the village there stood women talking and staring, with wondering children holding their hands or clinging to their aprons. Nature at Summerleas was decidedly anti-Malthusian, and defiant of all laws of political economy. Twelve shillings a week and damp cottages notwithstanding, children came and thrived; yet the unelastic world grew not one whit the bigger, and philosophy stood protesting and aghast. The jury *in posse*, Mr. Pitts, the butcher, Mr. Wilkins, the gunmaker, old Payne, the parish clerk, George's father, Mr. Gatteril, the exciseman, Farmer Brown, Mr. Hacker, the carrier,

Mr. Newbury, the head carter at the Abbey, Mr. Benson, the head groom, Mr. Target, the net maker, Mr. Penny, of the general shop, stood in a cluster round the door, waiting for the coroner, the Vicar, and their foreman, Mr. Harker. The crowd watched the cluster of favoured and responsible men with wonder and awe. There was much mysterious movement in the Peal of Bells, preparing the parlour for the coroner, arranging paper and pens and ink, and chairs and benches.

As the hour appointed—half-past eleven—drew near, the excitement increased. The crowd increased till it spread far into the street. Work was stopped, and a few men who had been left to look after the sheep, and do indispensable ploughing or hoeing, got as near the village as they could, to look on at a distance. Wonder and fear were working in every face.

Presently a fly drove up to the Vicar's garden gate, and the rumour ran that the Coroner had arrived. After that, every time the Vicarage gate opened or shut, or even when poor Wasp ran out and barked bravely at the unusual crowd, all eyes turned that way. A few minutes after, Mr. Harker's barouche swept round the park drive. The servant ran in with a message to the Coroner, an anxious-looking, worn man, with papers

under his arm, who came out, followed by the Vicar, and walked towards the Peal of Bells. At the same moment, the barouche drove back sharply towards the Abbey, as it was supposed to bring the widow and some other important witnesses.

The Coroner bowed to the jury, who took off their hats as he came up; then all immediately concerned in the inquest crowded into the village public-house parlour, a long low-roofed sanded room, with boughs in the fireplace, and a showy tea-tray, a Bible, and two bright brass candlesticks on the side table in the corner. Mr. Harker, who wore crape round his hat, and appeared pale and much affected (as the county paper afterwards said, in its very graphic report), sat near the Coroner, and conversed with him in whispers for a moment or two while the jury answered to their names and were duly sworn, two at a time, holding a Testament between them, and looking as uncomfortable as if they had been accomplices in the crime.

P. C. Archer stood, stolid and stern, by the open door.

The Coroner stated the case in a brief business-like way, without affecting emotion that habit had long since overpowered. The deceased, head keeper to Jabez Harker, Esq., of Summerleas

Abbey, on Friday, the 3rd of June, had started at twenty minutes past seven on his usual round of inspection, beginning at the Terraces. He was heard to discharge his gun twice soon after he left his own house, and about twenty minutes after he left it, two more almost simultaneous discharges were heard. Nothing more was seen or heard of him till a quarter to nine, when a man named Blake, a hanger-on at the stables of Swallowcliff Castle, being out for poaching purposes, stumbled in the dusk over a body close to a hut built for keepers to watch in at night. He instantly gave an alarm, and the body was found to be that of Travers. He had been shot dead by two discharges of a gun. His watch was missing. The only evidence bearing on the murder was that of a little girl, daughter of the deceased, who would depose that about a quarter to seven, while going on an errand to Birdbrook, she saw a man with a beard, and wearing a felt wide-awake, stealing up through the bushes near the hut. No trace of that man had yet been found. They would now view the body.

Only a moment the jury staid in the room to the left of the Lodge, and came out with awe-struck faces, ghastly white. One or two shed tears. Mr. Harker scarcely glanced at the corpse and then hid his face in his handkerchief. The

jury then returned to the inn, talking together in a low and hushed way, and resumed their seats, congratulating themselves at having got over so horrible a duty. Only the Coroner and one or two of the hardiest and most conscientious gave more than a frightened glance at the waxen face and the shattered body.

"The first witness," said the Coroner, peering at a hastily-written paper, "is, I think, Mary Anne Tanner."

"Travers," suggested Archer, "daughter of the deceased. "Mary Anne Travers!" he shouted, as a mere form, and then led into the room a pretty little frightened girl of twelve, dressed in black, whose eyes were red with crying. There was a murmur of sympathy in the room as she stood at the table, with her hand on the head of an old brown pointer that would follow her in. Her story was very simple, and told with sobs and many interruptions.

"My name is Mary Anne Travers," she said, understanding the nature of an oath, and being duly sworn. "I was sent on Friday evening, at a quarter to seven, please, sir, by mother, to get some cough medicine for my little brother Tom at Mr. Curtis's at Birdbrook. As I was going over the viaduct, just beyond the hut on the Terrace, I turned and saw a man with a beard

stealing up through the wood. I thought he was a poacher, and I was frightened, and ran on faster. I think he had a gun under his arm. I did not see him again. He was not a man I had ever seen before. He had on a dark loose coat and a wide-awake. I don't think he saw me. I went home by Fontford, and got home about eight."

"That'll do, my dear; you may go," said the Coroner. "This is not the first witness, Davis" (to his clerk). "Why don't you put them in proper order? That deposition can stand, but the first witness is Paddy Blake. Call Isaac Blake; and do be more particular, and not waste our time in this way."

The contrite clerk turned very red, and whispered something as Paddy Blake entered, wild and ragged as usual, but his coat brushed, shoes for once on his feet, and his hair in some slight form. He grinned idiotically as he pulled his forelock, and said that his name was really Isaac Blake, but he was generally known among sporting gents as Paddy Blake.

He required no questioning, but having been sworn, told his story with great volubility and in his own eccentric way.

"He had been taking a go of gin," he said, "with a friend of mine, a rat-catcher, at the Harker Arms, in Fontford, and left there about half-

past eight, intending to work home to the Swallowcliff stables, by the Abbey woods, when just by the hut on the Terraces, as he was looking for a wire noose he had seen there the day before, he stumbled over a body. He felt the face—it was cold; and the breast, which was wet and torn. He was so frightened that he could not move for a moment, but then he got up and ran like a madman to the Lodge, over bush, through everything, and called four keepers, who got lanterns, and went and found the body; he did not remove anything from the body; so help him God! The coat was open when he found him.

The Coroner and Mr. Harker were pressing this point by several questions, when Archer stepped forward and said that the watch of deceased had since been found under the pillow of his bed. He had not worn it that day. His purse with two or three sovereigns was found in his pocket.

P. C. Archer, next called, stepped forward with a brisk soldierly alertness, as much as to say, "Now I'll show you the way to give evidence," and delivered his story clean and crisply off the reel. On Friday night, at a quarter to nine, he was on duty at the corner of Fontford, just beyond the Harker Arms, waiting for a tramp who had stolen some cart harness beyond Knoyle, and who he thought might come that way, when a man of

Summerleas, named William Penny, one of Mr. Harker's keepers, came running up to him, and told him that there had been murder done, and that Mr. Travers had just been found shot by the hut on the Terraces. He went with him by a short cut straight to the Terraces, and helped to carry the body to the Lodge. There were no signs of a struggle where the body was found, and no papers strewn about.

Papers! Mr. Harker trembled, and the jury looked at each other.

No papers strewn about and there were no footsteps. It rained heavily that same night, however, and that might have washed the prints away. Every search had been made for the man the little girl saw, but as yet without success. Handbills had been issued, and telegrams sent to all the police-stations between Slobury and the coast, and Salisbury and London. If the man was to be found, he would be, no doubt, found before long.

Mr. Harker wished to know if there was blood on the face of deceased.

"Yes, in the mouth; a good deal."

"Was the coat torn by the shot?"

"Yes; and large pieces carried into the wound."

"Call Mary Travers," said the Coroner.

A shudder ran through the room: this was the

widow. The poor woman, dressed in black, and with her face hidden with a thick crape veil, entered the room leaning on Mrs. Brown's arm. She was sobbing hysterically, and Mr. Harker begged Archer to put a chair for the poor woman.

"I am very sorry, Mrs. Travers," said the Coroner, with more feeling than he had shown before, "to have to ask you several questions about this most unhappy affair, but it is indispensable for the ends of justice."

The poor woman's answers, made in a low voice and broken by tears and sobs, were difficult to put together, but it was gathered that she deposed that her husband had shown no depression of spirits latterly, nor had he expressed any fear of poachers. He went out at the usual hour, first loading his gun, as usual. He had been heard to fire twice, and two wood-pigeons were found in his pockets. The only thing stolen had been a packet of letters, which he always carried in his breast-pocket. What they were she did not know, but he had often told her they were worth money.

Mr. Harker had a question to put. He wanted to ask Mrs. Travers if the deceased had had a quarrel lately with anyone? was there any reason to suppose that there was ill blood between him and anyone in the village or neighbourhood?

The Coroner bit his pen and nodded his head in approval, as much as to say that that was a very sagacious and important question.

"Bring the poor woman a little water," said Mr. Harker to George, who was standing near the door.

The water brought, and Mrs. Travers having taken some, she replied—

"Yes, sir; he had had words with young Mr. Brown about his being arrested for poaching, and Mr. Brown had threatened to knock him down. That was at the public-house two nights before the murder."

The jury looked at each other and at Farmer Brown.

Young Brown, at hearing this, broke through the crowd, his hair ruffled, his eyes wild with anger.

"Mr. Coroner," said he, "this has been going about the parish already. It is a lie. I'll not live here to be accused as a murderer. Take me up at once. I've got witnesses here to prove that the day of the murder (it was the day of Salisbury market) I came back to Slobury by the 5.15 and was playing at billiards with Mr. Winter of Swallowcliff and young Jones of Knoyle from half-past five till seven; so that settles that. As to quarrelling with Travers, I had no great reason to like him, and I own it; but quarrelling and

murdering are two different things. Give a dog a bad name, and hang him. I'd better get away from this place. Everything is laid to my charge."

"Young man," said the Coroner, "all this is quite informal; there is no accusation against you yet."

"Keep quiet, Bob," said the old farmer; "keep your tongue between your teeth, can't'ee; there is plenty of time for you to clear yourself, and you can do it. None of my name will ever commit murder."

"I must ask you, Mrs. Travers, one more question," said the Coroner, when irrepressible young Brown was coaxed and jostled out of the room. "Was there any other person with whom the deceased had had any serious difference?"

"Yes, sir; he had had very angry words with Mr. Beauflower there about a favourite dog of his that got hurt in the woods. They had very high words in my hearing at the lodge door some weeks ago, and Mr. Beauflower threatened that he should repent of it."

A voice in the crowd said, "I can testify Mr. Beauflower was with me till four o'clock on the day of the murder, and that at a quarter to eight he arrived at Miss Chivers's to tea with Miss Amy Robinson; and there I met him again."

It was Mr. Goodrick who turned to the Coroner and said this.

"This, again, sir, is totally informal. No one dreams of accusing Mr. Beauflower, a gentleman and a minister of God, of such a horrible crime; but I'll make a note of your testimony, sir. It will prevent the necessity of further inquiry in that direction."

Oh, wealth and power! Poor Brown's volunteer statement had been received far less gently.

"Call in Dr. Briscoe; we must now have his evidence."

Dr. Briscoe came, professionally calm and bluntly honest, and, as conscious as ever under his grizzly brows of holding many secrets; he disdained all professional technicality and sham. What he had to say was very simple.

"I was called in on the night of Friday, June 3, to examine the body of the deceased. He was stone dead and cold. There had been two discharges of a gun loaded with buck-shot, which had torn away nearly the whole of the right lung, and must have caused almost instant death. Several shots had penetrated the heart, and all the neighbouring organs were also more or less injured. There was a mark of a boot that had trod with blood on the left side of the white moleskin waistcoat worn by deceased."

Mr. Harker here turned rather faint with the extreme heat of the room, and the Coroner begged that some one would throw open the window.

The red curtain was furled up and the window thrown open. It disclosed a wall of rough, honest Wiltshire faces, all staring with as much wonder and expectancy as if the murder was re-enacting by the jury before their eyes. A story had already got about that the Vicar had been taken up and was being tried for the murder.

"What sort of foot-print was this you saw, Dr. Briscoe?" said the Coroner. "The police must have that waistcoat."

"It was the print of an ordinary boot, with nothing special about it; but it was not a labourer's. Poachers about here are often mechanics from Salisbury."

"It might have been, then, a mechanic's boot?"

"Yes."

"That will do, Dr. Briscoe. Thank you. Was any of the wadding found, police constable?"

"Yes, sir," said Vincent; "it was a piece of the *Times*."

"Any name or direction upon it?"

Mr. Harker was again faint, and some water was brought him, while the wadding was brought into court, and flattened and examined by the

jury. There was nothing, however, about it to furnish any clue.

Mr. Harker changed seats with obsequious Mr. Pitt, who was nearer the door.

"Gentlemen of the Jury, there is one more witness to examine—Robert Travers, son of the deceased. He is only called to show that his father had for some reason or other (perhaps fear of murder) an intention of surrendering the head keepership at the Abbey; and he will also prove that there was no despondency about the deceased. Call in Robert Travers."

The murderer's blood froze to the centre, when a fine stalwart young fellow, with clear, keen, frank eyes, and an intelligent, manly manner, stepped in, and bowed to the Coroner and jury, and then specially to him (Harker.) The youth was the very image of his father, but thirty-five years younger, and without the hard lines of overbearing effrontery and selfish impudent cunning, that had defaced the murdered man.

"I am under-keeper at Lord Portsmouth's," said the witness. "I ran away from my father when I was fourteen and went to sea. For the last six years I have been in my present place. I was to be married last month, and at my wife's wish I wrote and made it up with my father. He came to tea this very day three weeks, and

dined and spent the night with us. He was in high spirits, and once or twice during the evening took a packet of letters from his breast-pocket, and told me they were worth a fortune to him. I was to have come over to-day to have some rabbit-shooting with him, and to see if I should like to have the place when he gave it up. He said he could make all that right with Mr. Harker. He talked to me of the poachers having been troublesome, but said he had found out a clue to them, and expressed no fear."

"That will do; thank you, young man," said the Coroner. "And a—Vincent, clear the room." The spectators jostled out, and the window was closed. Mr. Harker requested a glass of water.

The Coroner's remarks were few. That the deceased had been murdered by poachers or some footpad, was certain. There seemed at present to be no clue to the murderer; but heaven was very watchful, and no doubt the man, branded by remorse and the conscience that God never permitted to sleep, would soon be in the hands of the police. There could not be a doubt the man with the beard seen by the little girl was the murderer." Their verdict was an obvious one.

There was a moment's hush. Then a clustering of heads round Mr. Harker, one or two totally irrelevant doubts from Mr. Pitt and one

other of the jury, which were quietly ignored; the jury returned to their seats, and the foreman stood up. To the usual question he replied, in a low voice—

"We find a verdict that the deceased was murdered by some person or persons unknown."

The Coroner nodded approval of the verdict, and shook hands warmly with Mr. Harker, as if everything had gone off very pleasantly, and he hoped to get back in good time to dinner. The jury put their signatures awkwardly to the usual paper, and the inquest was over.

"I suppose you'll take that fine young fellow into your service, Mr. Harker?" said the Coroner, as he stood waiting for his fly.

"No," said Mr. Harker; "I could not really bear to be so constantly reminded of the horrible affair; but I shall pension the widow and children, and protect them for life. The gentlemen of the jury have been expressing a wish to start a subscription, but I shall not allow that."

CHAPTER III.

A PLOT.

Mr. Harker's barouche was waiting for him at the door of the Peal of Bells. It contained his wife and eldest daughter, both very anxious to know the verdict, but neither betraying much real feeling, except a certain selfish alarm of murderers in general. Harker was in no mood to discuss the inquest.

"Shall you and Carry," he said to his wife, "want the carriage before dinner? It is to-night, is it not, we go to the ball at the Harcourts'?"

"Yes, to-night. No, it is far too hot to drive further."

"Then, Thomas," said Mr. Harker to the driver, "you drive home quick with your mistress, and bring back a gentleman, Mr. Bassevi; you will find him waiting for me. You will overtake me on the road to Knoyle. I'll walk on. Mind you're quick. Good-bye, good-bye. I and Bassevi are

going to the marquis's to see some pictures—back by six. Have dinner at seven, sharp."

Mr. Harker, as the carriage drove off, shook hands coldly with Mr. Beauflower, who asked him in to lunch, shook hands with Dr. Briscoe and Mr. Goodrick, who were going to the Vicarage; and touching his hat in a general way to the crowd (not obsequious, for the Wiltshire poor man is upright and independent as a farmer, and is never slavishly civil), took the road to Knoyle alone.

He stopped a moment at the churchyard stile, where twenty-four hours hence they would rest the murdered man's coffin, and looked up sneeringly at the scaffold round the square grey tower that seemed to no more need propping than a giant in his prime needs a Bath chair. There was stone sawing, and shedding a gingery dust on the rank churchyard grass. There were hearty sailor-looking men (why do masons always look nautical?) dabbing at heaps of mortar; there were men carrying beams in at the church door, and shouting up into the belfry. The rumour at Summerleas was that the repairs were to cost 600*l.*, and the Vicar had not got together yet more than 150*l.*, and that some even of that was promises. It was supposed that Mr. Harker was to give all the rest, but what he would give was still uncertain.

"These fools!" said Harker to himself, as a builder came out, pencil in hand, called to one of the men, and seeing Mr. Harker, smiled, as much as to say, "Here is our milch cow," then bowed, and pulled down his hat, which was peppered with whitewash slightly dashed with brick dust,—"these fools plunge into these things just to be called zealous; headlong they go; trust to Providence to get them out of it; pack of children; set of plausible mischief makers, putting mischievous notions into poor people's heads, and proud as the devil."

The road was hot and dusty, the air burning, the skylarks, who never tire of praising God, and waste no time in wrangling about church clothes and peppermint-coloured decorations, were carolling in the burning azure air. The great elms were still transparent to the sun, as if their leaves had been of green silk. Under one of these trees, not far from the road-side house, in front of the ruin, Mr. Harker stood, angry and lowering, waiting for his carriage. He lit a cigar to pass the time, and cursed every time he stopped to spit. He never once, whatever way he looked, allowed his head to turn towards the terraces which were opposite, the hut glowing in the sunlight at the edge of the long line of firs.

Presently he heard wheels, and the carriage

emerged at the corner of the Abbey road from a cloud of hot brown dust. The splendid horses, churning white lather, stopped reluctantly for him. Mr. Bassevi was in it, his white hat stuck on one side of a head of coarse black hair, his face bistrous as usual, his coarse suspicious purgatorial eyes looked sunken and dissipated. He wore a vulgarly made white Chesterfield, a white waistcoat and ginger-coloured trousers, with black stripes down the sides, and he carried a great second-hand silver-mounted Malacca cane, with a heavy rhinoceros-horn handle. His scarf was the bluest satin; his scarf ring hideous with large emeralds. A gilt horse-shoe fusee-box was conspicuous among the spade guineas that dangled at his Albert chain. Mr. Harker greeted him curtly as he got in, and told the coachman to drive to Longleat, Fontford way.

"I've something to say to you," he said to Bassevi, offering the low bloodsucking wretch a cigar. "I want you to do something for me. It is just in your way."

"What way?—what way?"

"The sporting way."

"Oh, sporting way!" Bassevi leered at this, and licked his cigar all over as a boa constrictor licks the victim he is about to swallow. "Oh, some little game with a prad, I suppose, to keep

down the betting, and leave it for you? All right; I'm game. Art is not doing much now. Oh! those little prads, they ought to be shod with gold."

"No chattering—I'm not in the humour" (and Harker looked so savagely intent on one purpose, that Bassevi felt almost inclined to get out of the carriage.) Harker had grown prompt as a Cæsar now, and nothing should stand before his will. That was the Providence, the Fate he worshipped, the Ruler of all things, and the maker of Destiny. "You have had your pickings of this gull at Swallowcliff?"

"Well, I ain't done so bad, except he made me take back the Rubenses. Thanks to that d—— little nincompoop of an artist. Oh, it's a horse I'm to be down on."

"Fool, listen; you do nothing but chatter."

"Mightn't the coachman hear?"

"No, he's deaf, and we can talk low."

"Oh, you are leary!" said Bassevi, with profound admiration.

"Listen, and don't chatter and mag so. The fool owes me many thousands. Now, for reasons of my own, I want that race-horse he is so proud of——"

"Oh, he is hot on it. He'd bet anything on it, from Lombard Street to a China orange."

"Be quiet. It is enough that I require that horse to lose the race."

"I see; and you sweep the table."

"You're wrong. I shall clear 500*l.*, and only that to colour the thing. But I have secret reasons for it. I don't tell you, mind, how to get hold of the horse. You've done this sort of thing before. You remember Madcap, and his being found dead in the railway horse-box. Try that same stuff again, only let him live a little longer. Dilute the dose."

"Good," said Bassevi, with eyes half shut and a malign squinting smile, as if it came from an oblique conscience; "and the mopuses—the swag? Com biong?"

"Don't attempt to push up the price, for I never make more than one offer. There are plenty other people can do it, and I know a few of your secrets. You daren't blab much of me—250*l.*"

"Oh, come, give us the whole 500*l.*"

"250*l.* I shan't offer it a third time."

"Very well. There's no moving you to-day. You are dangerous. I can see at a glance. Shake hands—it's a bargain; and Immenschikoff, you look out. Lord, what a man it is! There never was a man so fly. I've money on though. I must hedge. Well, I dare say I can make 50*l.* more easy. I'll do the trick clean as a

whistle. There's only a big Irishman going with the horse and a vagabond fellow you see about here, that runs with the hounds. I know both their blind sides."

The carriage was just then passing through Fontford. A drag had just drawn up at Mr. Lawson's door, and young Cantelupe swung himself lightly down, tapped at the window, then opened the door, and entered just as the barouche came down the street. It almost seemed as if he saw who was in the carriage, but did not choose to notice. The Harker barouche darted through Fontford into the road that traversed the Downs and led to Knoyle.

"Oh, I see what brings him so often this way," said Mr. Harker.

There are moments when the thoughts of years seem suddenly to turn from vapour and to crystallise into solid irrefutable facts. In his state of mind, electric with internal storm and the ground-swell of an excitement that had been like concealed madness, Harker's judgment struck down like lightning at its mark. He saw at once, felt at once, that the young heir was in love with his governess and cared nothing for his daughter —probably never would; that there was only one way to win his title, and that was to so crush and humiliate him as to *compel* him to the mar-

riage; and that plan exactly suited Mr. Harker's iron will and not very gentle and conciliatory nature. Step by step, if not at once, he would contract his nets, and drive Cantelupe towards the only corner of escape—marriage with Miss Caroline Harker, of Summerleas Abbey.

"I know what he comes after," said Mr. Bassevi, after a pause, as if answering Mr. Harker's thoughts rather than his spoken words. "I know, but he shan't have her. I mean to have the girl though she sneers at me. I've taken a fancy to her, and I mean to have her."

"I should like to see the old father. Let us stop as we return."

"No, don't, pray don't; the man is conceited enough now; he'll raise his prices."

"Oh, I see. You don't want me to know what you grind the fellow down to. Very well. It's nothing to me, as long as you fulfil your contract, and give me good work. So you want this intriguing little minx, do you? I'm glad of it. It suits me as well as it does you. Marry her soon, the sooner the better. If the old fools won't consent, and are trying to trap the gull at Swallowcliffe, run away with her. She'll be useful in some of your nice little schemes."

"There's that young parson at Summerleas. Plague seize him, he's after her too; and I think

she does not dislike the fellow, but the old people are taken with the Castle and the title."

"I hate that Beauflower; that's the man sets the poor people against me; and they say he wrote that impertinent petition about the game for the Bibury farmers. But I'll be even with him. I'll break in two every one that crosses my plans. I have broken some, and I'll break the rest. Take care, Mr. Bassevi, you do not cross them, for I never forgive—mind that. But here's Longleat; it's a fine place."

As they got out of the carriage, and silently walked towards the house from that beautiful spot called not unadvisedly "Heaven's Gate," Harker thought within himself, "This fool of a girl married, I shall have one more rope round that young scatterbrain, and I shall be one step nearer to the title and the Castle, which I have so long coveted."

CHAPTER IV.

THE UNEXPECTED CANDIDATE.

THE Yellow address of Mr. Paradise, the Radical candidate for Bibury, was rather violent and aggressive, but by no means badly done. Mr. Paradise was a self-made man. He had come into Warminster thirty years before with the usual half-crown in the usual right-hand breeches pocket. A very agreeable form of poison, Paradise now advertised everywhere, with medical puffs upon it. What could not one get testimonials for, if one paid the price? Paradise lectured at Mechanics' Institutes, on self-made men, and had ground himself to a very fair edge by dint of hard reading and converse with other Paradises who had also entered towns on the half-crown principle, and ignored all early help and accidents of good fortune, with a frank blunt dishonesty, the usual prerogative of the self-made man and the selfish made man also.

Mr. Paradise, with a slap at the accident of

race, and the small merit of a good inheritance, dashed off with a protest against government expenditure—Whig or Tory—(it was only the difference of ten pounds in silver and ten pounds in gold). He was for selling all the dockyards at once, and building ships and everything else by private contract—not necessarily the lowest bidder—the competition to be always kept going—the inspection before approval to be incessant and severe. As for standing armies, he quoted Cobbett, and proposed that wars, too, should be done by contract. Some contractors he knew would have taken Sebastopol in six months, and for half the money. As for the government offices, with the hundred thousand young gentlemen wondering what they would do when they'd finished the day's paper, he could get all their work put up to contract and done by actuaries quicker and better for one-third the money. As for war, he was not for peace at all prices, but always for peace, if possible; mainly insuring it by not meddling with other nations, by resisting commercial aggressions and compulsory trade with either China or Africa, and by granting the colonies perfect independence directly they consented to pay the expenses of their own defence.

The Ballot? Well, that was a very natural question for Reformers to ask. He was for it

heart and soul as long as landlords and employers, directly and indirectly, everywhere prevented free, honest, and conscientious voting. Ballot-box or no, most men's votes would be known by their neighbours, but to the timid the ballot would be in many places a protection. The Tories had the face to condemn the ballot-box on the hustings, while they used it in their own clubs.

SHOULD TRADE UNIONS BE PUT DOWN? How could men dare to ask him whether working men should not be allowed to protect themselves by combination against the universal combination of rich employers, who, without trade unions, would be cruel and remorseless as slave drivers?

The GAME LAWS? Down with them. They were written in blood, and blood they still daily shed. Rabbits should be treated as wild animals, and of no more value than crows or daws. There should be no special laws to protect game, except the ordinary laws against felony. There had been more murders in England for the sake of a few miserable pheasants than there had been agrarian homicides in Ireland. The accursed system would go on just as long as two-thirds of the House of Commons were game-preserving country gentlemen, those hereditary legislators whose money sends them to Parliament, and who regard a dead hare as of more value than a brave

man's life. Down with the Game Laws, for they were written in blood.

"The electors of Bibury would see from these opinions," the address went on, "that he (Paradise) was no mealy-mouthed time-server, but a Radical of Radicals, willing to serve them honestly and well, but not to be their mere mouth-piece, nor willing to gain his seat by flattering pliability like the young dabbler in troubled waters, who wanted a seat as another ornament at his watch-chain, and who could be coaxed over to any camp, so vague and undecided were his irrational tenets.

"Signed

"JOHN PARADISE."

Paradise could indeed afford to be frank, violent, and outspoken, for Bibury was a Tory place, and his chances were very small. His customers in the place were, moreover, few, and his loss would end with the first outlay.

The nomination day had arrived, and so had the two candidates, with brazen bands, and banners, and much *Maltese* enthusiasm. The dead walls of the not too lively town were glowing with blue and yellow addresses. Everybody was walking about with yellow or blue rosettes, as if Coventry had just started a new order of knighthood.

Englishmen don't generally look very com-

fortable in artificial dress, but they glory in election colours, and wear them with as much unction as university men their blue ribbons at the great boat-race. There were Tories here who, in their zeal for their own opinions, would have painted the town steeple blue; Whigs who, in their ardour for oligarchy, would have painted the Town Hall yellow. But alas! the days when stubborn old Tory farmers insisted on being buried in true blue coffins, and Tory election agents waylaid bags of money on the way to Shaftesbury, had passed with the greatness of precious old Sarum, and the glory of that *pot pourri* of honesty—Grampound.

Bibury, blossomed into colour, looked more animated and alert than usual. It really looked as if King Alfred might just have marched out of it to meet the Danes in Dorsetshire. The streets were full of Blue and Yellow dressed people, laughing and bantering each other with the utmost good nature. Carriages and flies were every moment arriving from the suburbs and outlying districts, and were received with Blue and Yellow shouts and waving of hats and handkerchiefs. The political zeal of everybody, unstimulated by Blue or Yellow gold, would have cheered the heart of Cato, that noblest Roman of them all.

The Sheriff, a cousin of the Duke of Devonshire, and a tremendous person in his own estimation, had just driven in. Lord Mazagan, too, had alighted at the door of the Blue Hotel—the Cantelupe Arms, and was talking gaily to Colonel Harcourt, Dr. Briscoe, and Mr. Beauflower, as he flapped his jaunty leg with his whip.

"I'm like yourself, my lord," said Colonel Harcourt, a gentlemanlike old dragoon officer, bland, courteous, and a little choleric, "I can't go all the lengths of these young men; but I mean to support him with all my heart, because he's of the good old stock, and our families have held together these two centuries, indeed ever since Lady Blanche held Wardour for King Charles, and defied those canting psalm-singers."

"I told Fitz he was foolish to go to the infernal expense," said Lord Mazagan, who was thrifty; "but young fellows will have these parliamentary honours; it's very natural, and after all it can't be denied that, as somebody said, 'the House is the best club in Christendom.' Perhaps it'll tame him a bit."

"May I ask, my lord," said the colonel, with the most apologetic curiosity,—"don't think me intrusive,—but is it true, this rumour about the county that your nephew is going to marry Miss Harker? She's a fine girl."

"Well, well, they do say so, but I don't know," said Lord Mazagan, smiling in the most knowing way; "young fellows now are hard to pin down, they don't much like settling. Fitz hardly knows his own mind two hours together. He's full now of this race of his, and talks of sweeping the board."

"Dear! dear! Tut, tut! Well, we were young once. We don't know the world till just as we get notice to quit."

In the meantime, just inside the door, in sight of the surging Yellow crowd round the "Holly Tree," stood Dr. Briscoe, Mr. Beauflower, and Mr. Goodrick, discussing the murder.

"Can you tell me, gentlemen, if Mr. Harker has arrived?" said an excited waiter, who had been looking in every room. "Mr. Cantelupe particularly wants to speak to him."

"Not seen him," said the doctor, sharply. "It was the most horrid sight I think I ever saw in all my professional experience," he continued, "the body was more like that of a man who's been struck by a cannon point blank. That gun must have been fired about eight yards off, but not nearer, or the clothes would have been scorched."

"No news of any arrest. Seen the paper?"

"No," said Goodrick; "they took up a tramp at Exeter, but he proved to be insane. It is

my opinion the fellow got to Southampton and escaped. Murder will out. Stuff! Four out of six murders remain undiscovered; we meet murderers daily, and do not know them. They sell us tea, they drive us, they dine with us, they shake our hands."

"Did you ever see such a pack of leeches and toadies as that poor young fellow has got about him?" said Dr. Briscoe. "I do pity him; for there's really good in him. He is generous and honourable. If he plunges he'll pay, not sneak through the court like a cheating cheesemonger."

Just then Mr. Harker's carriage dashed up in royal style, and the gentlemen saluted him. He had Mr. Shekell, an attorney, with him, a suspicious, cadaverous, ferret-eyed man, carrying a black carpet bag. The footman lifted an enormous square parcel out of the barouche.

"Cantelupe," said Lord Mazagan, "is dying to see you, Harker; I'll go and tell him you're coming."

"My lord, pray don't trouble; I'll go myself. Just one word with my man of business here."

"Oh, yes; but I will."

"You're going too fast for us old Blues," said Colonel Harcourt, laughing.

"No," said Mr. Harker, gravely, "I don't hurry

at all. What I do here is from pure friendship and somewhat against my conscience."

"By-the-by, Harker, I told my man to take back that air-gun of yours to-day; thousand thanks. The boy was delighted with it for four days, then he took to a boomerang."

"Oh, it was of no consequence, colonel. I'm glad it pleased him. It reminds me of my poor boy. Good-bye; we shall meet on the hustings. I must be off to see my young friend. Mr. Shekell, let me show you the committee-room. We shall have a hard tussle now; the radicals are taking advantage of our candidate not being so Tory as the Bibury people could wish, and they're pressing us. We may lose it even now."

"I hope not," said the colonel; "but I never could understand what sort of magpie a Liberal-Conservative was."

"From a little I've seen," said Goodrick to Beauflower, as the doctor left them and followed Harker up-stairs ushered by eager waiters, "I really believe that wild young scapegrace has a hankering for Amy; he's so often there, and he always brings her presents."

"He may fool away his money as he likes," said Beauflower, somewhat angrily, and looking at the Yellow mob opposite as if he longed to fall upon them sword in hand.

Mr. Goodrick turned round to him, and looked into his eyes with the searching gaze of an oculist intent on finally assuring himself that there was or was not disease. "What?" he said; "no, is that true? How glad I should be if it was, for I really love that girl as if I was her father. I am irresistibly and magnetically led to her side. There, no confession; I expect none. Silence is one of the symptoms in these cases."

"Well, it is so," said the Vicar. "Yes, I love her. I love her dearly, and for ever, but our marriage——"

"Oh, so she's caught the fever too?" Goodrick smiled benevolently, and his eyes quite sparkled with pleasure.

"Yes, she loves me, but when we shall marry is uncertain. There are many lions in the path. I haven't told the father and mother yet; they may disapprove. I fear they incline to Cantelupe."

"Oh, they? they're nothing. Love against two old people. Love for ever. Ah! it makes me look back and sigh! I loved once. Well, there is still one place where we shall meet. Come, no more of that; but I am so glad. Let's go and see if the hustings are ready for this tomfoolery."

In the meantime Harker had sought the candidate, who was in a state of extreme nervous excitement and misery, being button-holed in one

corner of a hot, noisy, smoky room by two fat tradesmen, and coached as to present condition of the floorcloth trade of Bibury, and the necessity of a branch railway to Warminster. The air reeked with the offensive steam of bad brown brandy, and the smoke of bad cigars. Every now and then there was the bang of a soda water bottle cork, which sounded like an attempt at assassination. Bibury was a Pandemonium of corrupt voters.

The moment Cantelupe saw Harker he tore himself from the fat tradesmen, and shook him by the hand.

"Come in here," he said, "to my sanctum; there is only Jack Talbot there writing out my speech for me to put into my hat in case of anything breaking down in my memory."

He opened the door of a small parlour where Jack sat, with a bottle of champagne before him, smoking cigarettes.

"Jack," said he, "get out just for a moment, I want to have a word with Harker. You know Mr. Harker? Mr. Harker, Talbot: Talbot, Harker. Go and see if they've got the pink calico on the hustings yet."

"Harker," said the candidate, arranging his collar nervously, "I want another thou.; Fox tells me we must have it, that infernal Paradise is buying

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up half the men who've been holding back, and the rest want £30 each, the cormorants! It's too bad, 'pon my soul there ought to be reform somewhere. Now, don't look black, old fellow; you've got the mortgages all safe. I shall pull it off with Immenschikoff. It will be all right, you know; we understand each other."

"We may understand each other, but I cannot conceal from you the fact that you are very much encumbered. You've borrowed of me now more than 8000*l.*, and the last interest is still owing. I really cannot make this advance just now; money is very tight."

Cantelupe, not having expected resistance, hardly knew what to say.

"I must have it, or I shall fall through, sure as fate. I really want it to go on with, too, till my next rents come in. Oh, nonsense, old fellow, let's have it at once. It's deuced kind of you, I know, when I should have to pay those Jew fellows in Poland Street 60 or 80 per cent. I tell you fairly, I'm up a tree if you don't give me time."

Harker sat down and thought for a moment, then he rose and went to the window, below which a Blue mob had assembled and was shouting, "Cantelupe for ever. No swipe sellers!" When he turned again, his face looked very stern.

"Cantelupe," he said, "I and my family regard

you almost as a son, but I should not be doing my duty if I encouraged you to throw away more money in the mad, reckless way you're doing. I will not give you this money, moreover there is no use my disguising from you the fact, that I have conscientious scruples against deserting my cause, and advocating tenets in which I do not agree. I am of the old school, and I have a conscience. You will want money for Ascot and Longchamp."

"Yes, rather; Paris is an awful place for spending money in."

"I'll lend you two thousand if you'll surrender this contest."

"In whose favour."

"Mine!"

"That's cool."

"Well, I mean it. My friends here urge me to put myself forward, now that you are likely to be beaten from not being Tory enough. They grow so clamorous for me that I cannot refuse, and indeed my address and bills are already posted. Refuse to do this and I at once foreclose every mortgage."

"I feel as if I was knocked silly," said Cantelupe, pouring himself out a tumbler full of champagne, and drinking it at a draught.

"My lawyer tells me you are desperately crippled, and entreats me to lend you no more.

Come, it is for your good. Do you accept my terms? Shall I sign the cheque?"

He sat down, and drew out a long, flappy book.

"You have me in a cleft stick, there's no doubt about that," said Cantelupe bitterly. "I'm hard hit. I'm a fool, I know, but still I must have money. Will you keep the Jews off me for a month, till I can run Immenschikoff?"

"I promise, but not longer. You must give me 50 per cent. this time. I must not drag my family down in your ruin. Give up the turf, pull in, and you'll soon get round; above all, marry, and marry prudently."

"Clash! bang! Cantelupe for ever!" began the people under the window. "Where's Cantelupe?"

"If you mean what you say step out into that balcony, and tell those fools that circumstances have arisen, and that the tendency of the promises is such, as to induce you to at once resign in my favour."

"It's devilish hard. I don't think its doing quite the handsome thing by me. Let a fellow—make it three thou.? You're hard as flint. Well, I suppose I must. Here goes." And Cantelupe, with a melancholy gulp, as if he was swallowing a very large and bitter pill, jerked open the glass folding doors, and waved his hat to the crowd.

There was a whirlwind of cheering as Cantelupe waved his hat for silence. He expressed in a few stammered words, to their intense astonishment, his intention of retiring.

"Cantelupe for ever! Keep up your pecker. Never say die, young 'un!" shouted several enthusiasts; then gradually, as he retired bowing, the cries of the fickle Blues changed slowly but surely to, "Harker for ever! True blue for ever! No Trimmers! No half measures!" And certainly the full, very full quart measure had not been neglected on that glorious day.

"There," said Cantelupe, returning, and slamming the window angrily, "now you've got what you want, give me the cheque; here's my I O U. Thanks. You can be my money-lender again, but you shall never be my friend, Mr. Harker. I may be a poor fool and a dupe, but I have at least the traditions of a gentleman, and I will not disgrace them, however hard up I get. Good morning, sir; our acquaintance is at an end."

"A most disgraceful plant, Fitz," said Jack Talbot afterwards; "by gad, I'd shoot the fellow."

"A most shameful and shabby trick," said Lord Mazagan, to a circle of county gentlemen; "no doubt he has involved the poor lad in debts, but he shan't get much by it, for we'll start Colonel

Harcourt's son, and the Liberals and Tories shall coalesce."

"Shameful bit of sharp practice!" said Talbot. In the old time I'd have called him out, by Gad!"

"The fool struggles," said Harker to himself, as he headed a procession to the hustings, "but after all, he can't go further than his chain."

CHAPTER V.

THE LOVERS' MEETING.

It was a few days after the nomination at Bibury, at which Mr. Harker stood only third, that the unhappy Vicar of Summerleas was pressed closer and closer by debts that grew nearer and nearer, like the walls of that dreadful room in the inquisition that slowly crushed life out of its victims. The leaky boat had to be baled incessantly or it would sink. It was a heart-breaking trial, and only Hope and Love, and Faith in God could have kept him from despair. Time, time was all he asked of his pitiless pursuers. Time to sell his father's library to advantage, time to finish his theological work, time to get pupils. For time, Mr. Fairfield, his solicitor, was pleading, but promises were only sops that delayed these blood hounds but for a moment.

Beauflower had at last resolved to see Amy's father and mother. Julia was eager that he should

do this; she, in her frank, generous, outspoken way, saw no reason for further delay. She knew nothing or but little of her brother's struggles with the Pieuvre, and what difficulties she did see she looked at in a woman's sanguine way, and treated as mere cobwebs in the path of Love. She was so fond of Amy, so longing to call her sister, so desirous to see her brother's life cheered by a loving, tender wife. Somehow or other Julia had shown more sympathy lately with the married state, and had grown more silent, gentle, and meditative. As for the excellent but over-anxious old lady, she received the news with reasonable composure, but still not altogether with quite unruffled pride.

"My dear Edward," she said solemnly, smoothing out her broad lavender satin pink ribbons as she addressed the Vicar. "I confess that I had hoped you would have aimed somewhat higher; artists are, I'm afraid, an ambiguous, careless sort of people, generally of no family, and not always quite presentable; but Amy is a dear good girl, and I think she will make you happy, and if you can only avoid being overwhelmed by her friends, such people as that wild Irish major for instance, and are not perpetually being worried for money by that hopeless, weak creature, her father, I have no doubt that you will not regret your

marriage; but now if you only could have liked Canon Wilson's daughter for instance."

"Thirty-two, and a moustache; no thank you, mother, I am afraid our notions of a wife differ."

"Well, but she is so worthy."

"Worthy, yes, but not lovable; reads books on the plurality of worlds, and, what is worse, misquotes them."

"Yes, she is a little of the blue-stocking. Well, then, there were the Rector's sisters at Poynton."

"Three rank old maids, ugly as the Fates—one squints interestingly, another laughs like a hyæna, and the third limps. True, they have 300*l.* a year each."

"Ha, Edward, you are hard to please. I am afraid you look too much for mere perishable beauty."

"Perishable? Why, beauty is the most lasting of all things. Ugliness only gets more hideous."

"I only hope Amy will make a good housekeeper, but I fear she has much to learn. She is totally ignorant of the management of servants, and is far too disposed to be indulgent."

"So much the better. Suspected people soon become worthy of suspicion. Amy is young, mother, she'll learn all these things quickly under good tuition like yours."

"Well, I hope she will. It took me many years to learn what I now know. Look at Julia now, she actually did not know yesterday how much bread we ate a week, and asked me what an aitch bone was. Ah! girls are not what they used to be, they are so forward now, and they expect everything to be done for them. I was brought up to call my father 'sir,' and never was allowed to speak till I was spoken to."

"Well, my dear mother, we cannot turn the world back. Girls now are more independent, and as a great many never can marry at all, perhaps it is better they should be."

"Ah! everything is changed. Give me the girls of my young days."

"They were no doubt charming, but I am quite satisfied with those of the present. Amy is perfect. There is none of the modern masculine defiance about her, she is not fast."

"She is very nice, but if you could only have seen a Miss Hudson I went to school with. She married the Consul at—dear me, where was it? —oh, at Labrador, and her husband used to beat her. Poor creature, she took to drinking, and ran away with a merchant captain, who was never heard of afterwards."

From many other rather incoherent youthful experiences, Beauflower was preserved, just as he

had thrown on his zephyr and seized his wide-awake, by the entrance of Julia, who wanted some tickets for mutton for a sick woman at Stoat's Nest. As the Vicar whistled for Wasp, now in pristine health and only limping genteelly, and deposited Zoe, his pet kitten, in a snug corner of his easy chair, Julia followed him to the door and threw her arms round his neck.

"God speed you, Ned!"

"Suppose they won't give me their consent, Ju?"

"Won't give! you stupid old thing; but they must, and they shall. If they don't, it's mere selfishness, and I'd run away with Amy if I was a man."

"A nice scapegrace you'd be."

"No worse than men in general. Wave your handkerchief on the bridge if all goes well."

"I will."

"Do you know, Ned," said Julia, picking at a rose that hung over the trellis of the porch, "it's very silly, I know, when I feel that you and Amy were made for each other, but I almost pity poor Mr. Cantelupe; I think he is rather smitten with her."

"Pooh! he'll be easily consoled. There are plenty of girls more suitable for him than Amy. There's that dashing girl with the great eyes whom we saw at the Harcourt's croquet party."

"Oh! the most horrible flirt; why everyone noticed her. Oh! she's a horror of mine."

"Then there was that girl with the blue eyes we met at dinner at the Harkers'. Vulgar, red-faced mother!"

"What, that stupid little thing, without two ideas, and hair like tow?"

"You seem very particular in your selection for him, Ju. I think you've a sneaking likeness for Cantelupe?"

"What, I! Nonsense. The last man."

"Ah! girls often say that of the first man."

"Don't talk nonsense, sir, or I shall be angry."

The Vicar laughed, picked a scarlet geranium that grew by the door, and held it up to Julia's reddened cheek. "Look," he said, drily; "it just matches. Good-bye, Ju; don't be angry with me—wish me luck. If I fail I shall be the most miserable wretch on earth. Ju, you aint angry?"

But Julia had swept round and closed the door. There were tears in her eyes, and she was too proud to show them.

The Vicar took the path up by Travers's on to the high level of the terraces. There was a waggon at the door of the lodge removing furniture. The widow was going into Hampshire to live with her son. The children were crying in the garden. The Vicar passed up over the dead

leaves and under the beech trees till he got into the upper plantation, and out between the juniper bushes and laurels on to the broad turf walk. It was a part of the Abbey wood now, that even the keepers shunned at night, for there was a rumour that the ghost of the murdered man had been once or twice seen in the dusk of moonlight going into or emerging from the hut. Beauflower did not care to awaken painful recollections by passing the exact spot, but he cast a look towards it. The sunshine was upon the hut, now the fir wood rang with the thrushes' songs, and beyond, over the wheat fields, he could hear the larks singing their ceaseless hymns of praise. It seemed impossible that human blood could ever have been shed there, for it seemed the very playground of innocence and happiness.

The wood in which the hut lay ambushed was on the Vicar's right hand; on his left the terrace plateau sank away like the wall of a fortification some fifty or sixty feet down into the valley, towards the Abbey stables and kitchen gardens. Beyond, towards Fontford, spread fields and ploughed lands, and above rose further portions of the Abbey wood. By-and-by, after crossing one or two lanes, the Vicar came into wilder portions of the terraces, where the ground undulated. The right hand plantations grew wider and more

like forest. Great silver firs, fifty feet high, that had been the special glory of old Mr. Staunton, who was a connoisseur of trees, stretched out their huge masts and vast drooping limbs like giants, extending the right hand of fellowship. One huge fellow that looked a hundred feet long had been smitten by the lion winds of early March, its roots having no deep hold in the chalk which they had reached. It lay a vast ruin across the edge of the wood, just where the terrace sank into a sudden hollow, its dusky growth of some fifty summers destroying many a track of violet, primrose, and hyacinth,—innocents which had shared its ruin as unoffending courtiers sometimes share the downfall of tyrants they have been unlucky enough to serve too faithfully. Still deriving some little nourishment from the vast lump of earth that clung to them; even in misfortune the great dark branches yet retained that dewy bloom from whence the tree derives its name. Deep in the wood, beyond a small square woodman's hut, an axe could be heard chipping and cleaving at some fallen Dagon, and a woodman's boy was singing and shouting from pure enjoyment of life as he piled billets of wood into a tall square sacrificial altar as if preparing for some Hindoo widow. On the other side of the terrace a great horse chestnut, late in flowering,

spread its huge fans of leaves, on which the balanced cones of creamy and pink blossom had now faded off, and everywhere in the open parts of the covert the dog-roses were opening their fragile pearly cups that diffused the most delicious of summer odours. On one huge fir, dark as a churchyard yew, an invisible raven croaked in cynical protest against the universal happiness of earth and heaven.

Treading the Pieuvre under foot, careless of all trouble now that he was on his way to meet his betrothed, the joy of his heart, the hope of his life, the light of his eyes, the young Vicar sprang down the hollow and up the other side, the springy mossy turf soft under his quick pliant foot. Quick as a young Indian-brave on the war trail, he dashed through the ranks of firs, and stood at the very end of the terraces. It was the head of a long ridge of chalk, that, rising like a Titanic pier above this part of the Wiltshire Downs, suddenly came to a "fault," as Cornish miners call such abrupt geological changes, and broke precipitously by a cliff-like descent into the huge plain, that, stretching across the frontier of Dorsetshire, runs level till it meets those hills that bound the Dorsetshire coast beyond Weymouth. From this terrace bank of dry turf, bordered by beech trees, you descended to the open Down on the right, and

on the left to a narrow slanting lane that passed a chalk pit and a wood and ran between deep banks, where the fern and foxglove met in nodding fellowship.

Beauflower, sitting down on the bank, where the small moss was scorched brown, where blue and yellow flowers enamelled the sod, and where the beech roots were not too near the surface, looked down on the village of Birdbrook, whose little grey church lay half a mile off among the meadows somewhat above the village. To the right, where the Downs again rose into high ridges, there was a windmill tossing its telegraphic arms in unheeded messages about the price of flour. In the valley immediately below, under Birdbrook wood, there was a woodman at work cutting brush with his shining billhook, and beyond a man lazily ploughing and plodding after his team of strong grey horses.

The Vicar sat with his back to a beech tree musing over the scene of fairy land now bathed in the clear warm air of June. Love, too, threw its sunlight upon the scene, making the blue sky a deeper sapphire, the white rolling clouds more snowy, the very breath of the roses more like the breath of angels. Then all at once the dream-land vanished at the yelp of a keeper's dog and a croak of the misanthropic raven, and the lover's thoughts turned

irresistibly to Harker. Since the keeper's murder, and since his defeat at Bibury by young Harcourt, he had grown reserved, silent, and difficult of access. There was a report that he had been ill, but Dr. Briscoe had not attended him. He had appointed another keeper, a Scotchman, a sleek, quiet, subservient fellow, who was as hard and relentless as Travers, but easier to manage and less offensive in manner. The death of the keeper seemed to have roused Mr. Harker's fears, for it was reported in the village that he considered his own life not safe, and carried a small revolver always with him. He would be softened now, Beauflower thought, and then a means of escape from the pursuing Pieuvre struck him. It would be easy, under the very legitimate pretext of asking money for the church, to meet the terrible and oppressive exaction of 10*l.* that the builder required every week, and to get sufficient to pay also the dreaded dilapidations that the committee now wished settled. There would be no compromise of self-respect in such a request, nor would Mr. Harker be likely to refuse it. What was 200*l.* to a millionaire? Even Beauflower's jealous pride did not very much shrink from the request, for in July the second payment of tithes would clear all, and give him money enough for a honeymoon tour on the Rhine or in Italy. He had paid his

47*l.* insurance by a great effort just in time; the rest was not pressing. As for the cheating Oxford attorney, who took a mean advantage of a mislaid receipt, he could wait. So it should be; and this Harpy care driven off, Beauflower soon gave way again to the delights of a lover's expectancy, and thought only of Amy, of her sweet little face as she put back her hair, to dress to come out, of her look when they should meet.

But there was first the somewhat dreaded visit to Fontford to make. Procrastination, half asleep beside him on the moss, that Lazy Lawrence that turns half our resolutions into wishes and half our deeds into dreams, the softest, demurest, but not least dangerous of the evil angels that mislead man, whispered, "Not to-day, to-morrow; they might say no, and that would spoil all the pleasure of seeing Amy. My dear fellow, never hurry; no, do it to-morrow."

Beauflower turned and listened. The subtle fiend chuckled silently; but the clear clarion voice of duty, ever a sentinel in his heart, rang out the words "To-day, to-day," and sounded the "monte cheval" that true spirits never disobey. So up he sprang like a soldier who hears the "dress bugle," and darted off on foot for Fontford, straight as an arrow across the "crop-eared" Down.

A ten minutes' run brought him to a point in the road where he could see the smoking chimneys of Fontford; another three minutes, and he was down past the police station and in the chief street close to the Robinsons' lodgings. The great black clock with the gilt letters on the church tower at the top of the street on the Bibury road struck one as he entered Fontford. He was to meet Amy at the stile at the end of the terraces at two.

Poor human nature! It is for all the world like a handful of sand, the moment you close it up at one finger it runs out at the other. Gallant heroes, who, having the toothache, have put on their hats and started bravely for the nearest dentist, have ere this been known to entirely recover on the very doorstep; so it was that the Vicar, at the very next door to Lawson the carpenter's recoiled at the sight of Cantelupe's drag at the Harker Arms, and felt all his courage melt in a moment, as snow melts on the hot pavement over a baker's workshop. He did not feel jealous, but he saw great obstacles rising like the black teeth of a reef out of a foaming sea of trouble. He dared not face the Robinsons just then, so he passed the window quickly, and gave one glance in unobserved. There was the major, with his back to the window, holding up a huge Jan Steen

glass, probably creaming with the Charlemagne Champagne. His scarlet Fez cap was on his head, and he was roaring the refrain of his favourite song—

> "And devil a man shall go to jail,
> From Garryowen, my glory."

Exactly opposite him sat Cantelupe, his head between his hands, his elbows on the table, laughingly lighting a huge cigar. That smart dog-cart in Lawson's yard was no doubt waiting to bear the major to fresh commercial triumphs. Beauflower turned and fled—it was cowardly, but it was natural—and sought solace in the dear hope of the blessed hour that was approaching. He walked slowly back across the Downs to the end of the Abbey terraces.

It was a perfect day—a prize day. The sheep were feeding happily, as if rejoicing in their speedy change into legs and quarters; the white butterflies were trading in short voyages from flower to flower; the flowers were blowing fickly about, as if coquetting with their fretful lovers, the bees, who kissed and quarrelled, and then kissed again. It was a day made for lovers and for youth. Out upon the lagging sun, that seemed standing still above Birdbrook as if suddenly striking work, overpowered with his own heat. Half-past one at last, after waiting two hours as it seemed.

The shadows short now, and the sun almost too powerful. The birds struck work, also, except in the cool green dimness of the inner wood; the big white butterflies were languid with the heat; the raven was silent, therefore probably asleep in a melancholy way, and sullenly forgetful for a time of his grievances.

Amy was not to come over the terraces, but by a cross path that led into the plain below round by Swallowcliff. She had to leave Ethel at a croquet party at the Fosters' at Tollard Magna. So the Vicar dashed down the steep lane between the high banks, and passed through the gate at the bottom to the right of a little sand pit. He emerged in a large tract of flat pasture-land, broken here and there by high ground, and running at the bottom of a sloping wood all musical with birds. A few quick steps brought him to the summit of a knoll from whence he could see half Dorsetshire, with its orchards, plough-lands, and wooded pastures, spreading out like a vast outspread map. A mile or two off rose the hills of Kingsettle and Danebury; from the former King Alfred was said to have watched his Saxons hewing back the Danish robbers from Wiltshire, and on the latter there were the trenches of a Roman camp. Far, far spread the blue distance, dimming as it receded

till it reached that faint waving line of blue cloudy hill towards the sea. Along the edge of Everley copse, fragrant with clustering and scrambling honeysuckle, the rabbits were bounding into the air and gambolling like lambs at play. Then he went back to the stile, and waited for the apparition of that sweet face, and the soft fall of the little foot that was well-known music to his ear.

There was no sound but the occasional melancholy lowing of one of the red Devons in the pasture, now and then the shout of some Irish haymakers in a far-off field, and the ceaseless carol of a blackbird in the copse to the left of where he stood. A supreme happiness brooded in his heart like a wild dove in her nest, for who could have imagined that there was thunder in that great white cloud that "toppled" overhead like a half melted iceberg in a summer sea. But, yes! there was one omnipresent murmur when he listened quietly—that civilizing sound which has now penetrated almost every nook of Great Britain—the battling sound of passing trains, that in some distant valley shot past on their swift way to Exeter.

The Vicar could only see about a hundred yards up the lane, for at that distance it took a sharp turn, and the fern sprays and the hazel boughs, with

their broad blots of leaves, threw a green darkness over the path. All at once a great sooty blackbird came whistling in terror towards him down the path, and seeing him darted into the side wood. Soon a glimmer of a white parasol appeared, then the rustle of a grey silk dress, and lastly, a pretty smiling face, brighter with the quick walk. It was Amy: quick as light, Beauflower vaulted over the gate, and in a moment his strong arm was round her little trim waist, her little neatly-gloved hand, exquisitely small as Titania's, clasped in his, and then their lips met in one long, loving, insatiable kiss, and then came fondling words of delight.

"I'm afraid, Edward, I'm late. Oh! I am so glad to see you."

"It seemed years, dearest, but it is only ten minutes past two, so you're very good!"

"What a lovely day! isn't the air balmy? I did so enjoy the walk through the hay-field; but then I always enjoy the walk that brings me to you. I've got to go into Birdbrook, dear, to take some music to Miss Burcombe. Oh, dear! Mrs. Harker is so cross and cruel; if it wasn't for Ethel, I don't think I could bear it."

"My own sweet!" said Beauflower, punctuating his remarks with kisses on Amy's eyes, lips, and temples, just where the hair was so pale and

golden; "it is not for long, you shall soon leave those purse-proud people."

"Oh, how happy, happy we shall be!" said Amy.

The Vicar looked at her. She wore a silvery grey silk dress, made with almost French purity of taste, and above it a little tight-fitting black silk mantle (we question if that was the exact name for it), and a little straw hat with two poppies cockaded on the left side, and pale fawn-coloured gloves that fitted to perfection.

"Why, Amy, my own," he said, holding both her hands, "I never saw you look so bewitching. That dress is perfection!"

"Oh! don't make me vain, Ned; you really mustn't. You know a poor governess is obliged to dress like a Quaker; but you like grey." Then Amy leaned against her lover's shoulder, and looked up into his eyes with such serene happiness and such tranquil and perfect reliance, that Pluto himself must have softened at such a look, and have instantly thrown open his iron doors to the Eurydice who gave it.

They sat down together as by one impulse on a dry mossy bank under the shade of a silvery rinded beech tree, whose shade is always so light, playful, and transparent; presently Beauflower ran down into the meadow like a delighted boy chasing the cows and ponies that were feeding

there, and gathered Amy a great bunch of orange spotted cowslips, that, with no special odour, were fragrant of summer and its delights, and a tossing plume of delicious meadow-sweet, and then came laughing back to brush them lightly over her mouth.

"Oh, don't, Ned!" she said, with the prettiest petulance, "you scatter my hair so."

"Then he shan't!" said Beauflower, sitting down quite close to her, and his arm stole irresistibly round her waist; "he won't be cruel any more." Soon relapsing into gravity, "Oh! Amy, darling, he said, "I had quite forgot I have a little present for you, I brought from Salisbury on Monday. It isn't worth your having, except that it may remind you of me when we part."

"Which will be never," said Amy, locking her hands round his big sturdy arm, and she said it with such playful tenderness that St. Anthony himself would have instantly proposed marriage. "Oh, it's something very beautiful, I know!"

Beauflower drew a little horseshoe-shaped case of green morocco from his pocket and opened it. It contained a little plain gold betrothal ring, with a brilliant in the centre, and two little rubies, red as a snake's eyes, guarding it, one on each side. He took it from its soft white satin bed, and taking off her glove slipped it, as skilfully as

if he was always doing such things, on the little white second finger of her right hand.

A beautiful flush of rose colour spread into her cheeks, and from there to her forehead, while tears gathered like rival diamonds in her beautiful brown eyes as she kissed him and said,—

"Oh! it is so lovely; but you ought not to have gone to such expense for poor little me. But, dearest, I mustn't wear it, you know, till you get papa's consent. Ask him to-day—do!"

"They should have been emeralds," said Beauflower; "but the jeweller thought the rubies looked so far better. You know in old times people thought rubies turned pale if the giver's love grew colder."

"But your love never will—will it?"

"Never—NEVER!"

Then there was more kissing, every kiss seeming to the lover sweeter than the last, and of a rarer honey.

"What bird is that, Edward?" said Amy, as there came from the near copse just behind them a smothering, half human sound, tremulous as with love and sorrow, and full of a deep rich melody that seemed suppressed.

"That is a nightingale, Amy!"

Then they listened, their faces quite close to each other, and the bird sung to them tidings of great

hope and joy, till it became time for Amy to run with the music. Beauflower gave her his hand and lifted her up as easily as if she had been a child, and they walked together across the four hay-fields, where the grass plumes tossed brown and purple among ebbing and flowing tides of floating golden blossom, till they reached the stile that led into Birdbrook, then they kissed and kissed again, and looked into each other's eyes and stole one more kiss, and at last parted, he watching her till she turned the corner of the road, she turning now and then to nod him a kiss. They were to meet in half an hour at the other side of the wood, and till then he would lie down and read Keats's "Endymion," or sketch a group of cattle, he was not resolved which. If he was asleep she had promised to wake him, as Endymion was awoke, with a kiss. It was no wonder, therefore, that he went up on the knoll, threw his handkerchief over his eyes, and almost instantly fell asleep. The blue sky rolled on overhead, the summer wind bent the flowers that grew beside him, a yellow butterfly fluttered over his head, but he slept calmly on and dreamed of Amy.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BATTLE WITH THE CYCLOPS.

It was rather more than an hour after that Amy, with the bunch of cowslips still in her hand, tripped lightly over the stile at Birdbrook and came singing to herself across the meadows at the foot of Squire Everley's woods. At the second field towards the knoll, she saw with alarm, some fifty yards before her, two gigantic tipsy Irish haymakers, half-crazed with cyder, on their way, with two big stone jars, to the Jolly Waggoner at Birdbrook. They were huge, navigator-looking monsters, without their coats, and in dirty shirt sleeves, their braces hanging down, and their gleaming scythes trailing at their backs. The one was a wicked-looking black-haired fellow of the lowest Celtic type—bad forehead, piggish eyes, and staring cheek bones; the other a red-bearded, one-eyed giant, with coarse large features, bony forehead, and a rather savage mouth. They were singing, wrangling, and denouncing the

low wages, when, to Amy's utter horror, they caught sight of her as she tried to glide past them, and both stopped and, taking a cruel pleasure in her terror, held out their arms like men driving cattle. One flourished his scythe to bar the road, while the other advanced in a half maudlin, half coaxing way, that was even more terrible than the anger of the other.

"Tattheration to me," roared the red-haired, one-eyed ogre, "but here's the purtiest little Orange gurleen as ever I set eyes on since I've been in this God-forsaken counthry. Make her stop and give us a kiss each, Mike O'Kelly, or bedad, by the Seven Shrines at Clonmacnoise, I'll mow her down."

"Put a dacent tongue in your head, Dennis O'Reilly," said the other plausible villain, stealing nearer to Amy, who felt her blood turn cold, and was looking in vain for Edward. "That's not the way, you gommoch, to put the comether on a dacent little Protestant Colleen dhas with the golden hair; come here, my purty little colleen; come here, acushla; come here, mavourneen, and love the man who is dying for ye."

"Come out of that, you spalpeen; none of your blarneying ways. Fair play with the girl. I'll have the first kiss, or I'll cut the liver out of

ye. Bad scran to you if I lay a finger on you! Only just wait till I can give you a polthouge, you carnying spalpeen. I'll dig your grave for you, bedad, with this hand."

The black-haired scoundrel had just gripped the wrist of Amy, when the red-haired giant, staggering up, threw down his scythe, and dragged his companion from the screaming and almost swooning girl. The next moment, butting like mad bulls, the two drunken men, with howls of rage, flew at each other and grappled foot to foot.

The prospect of escape, so mercifully sent by Heaven, recalled Amy to her senses. With one wild look round for her lover, she fled, swift as Daphne, down the meadow back towards Birdbrook, the other path being blocked by the combatants, and the high grass beyond impeding her flight.

The wrestlers, bleeding and hot, coalesced on seeing her escape, and, sobered by the loss of blood—for they had cut themselves severely against the scythes—pursued her with waving arms and frantic cries. There was the Celt in perfection—the sober, civilized, warlike, generous, tractable Celt, to whom the Saxon is but a clod of earth! It was the last frightened shriek of Amy, as she sunk fainting to the ground, that awoke the sleeper on the knoll. Heaven-roused,

he leaped up startled, and saw in a moment the great horror and the danger. Quick as an Indian warrior he leaped down upon the foe, his short blackthorn stick in his hand, and fire of generous rage burning in his eye. The two wretches had again closed in fight over their victim, but they drew apart and closed on the enemy as he came near and shouted :

"You murderers, dare to touch a hair of her head, and, God helping, I'll kill you both!"

"Hear him, Dennis! hear the Protestant omadhaun! Hit round at him!" cried the black fellow, now no longer bland and plausible. "Keep him back while I go and get my d—— scythe and cut his Saxon head off. Give him a quieter between the eyes, that'll show him he's met an O'Kelly."

"Lave him to me, ma bouchal," cried the red ogre.

Grinning with all his yellow horse teeth in horrible delight at the murderous blows he planned, "Come on now you, you black sarpint!" he cried. "What's the girl to you? She's promised us a kiss, and we mane to have it, plase the pigs. I've been wanting a fight these ten days. I'm getting quite mouldy in this cursed counthry. Come on if you ain't one of the white horse spacies, and I'll give you a pot-walloping. Look

alive there, Mike, with the scythes; we may want 'em."

The giant squared his tremendous hairy arms and advanced scornfully, like Goliath upon David; but the rage of Achilles was burning in Beauflower's heart. He parried no blow, he thought of no science, but rushing straight as a thunderbolt on the Cyclops, beat him to the ground with a smashing blow upon the right temple. The fellow arose, furious, but half stunned.

A roar of defiance, as from a mammoth rather than a man, arrested the combatants, towards whom the other mower was now bearing down fast, screaming, "The O'Reillys for ever, and down with the Orangemen!" The new-comer was the major, who, driving past the Birdbrook stiles, had recognised Amy as she ran and fainted, and had run to her assistance as fast as rather too much champagne would let him, waving an oak stick nearly as thick as a bedpost. The O'Kelly seeing this Blücher arrive on the field of Waterloo, at once dashed at him, scythe in hand.

"Man a pike" against a rhinoceros, throw a net over a whale, but don't run your head against an O'Donovan, armed to rescue innocence. There was a moment's parley.

"Who are you, you murthering villains? How dare you touch that lady?"

"Who am I, is it? I'm Mike O'Kelly, and I'll cut you into pound pieces!"

"And I," said the major, "am a Flaming O'Flannigan, and if you don't drop that scythe I'll beat your skull into mincemeat."

The rascal made one savage sweep at the major's legs, but falling rather short, and carried a little past Donovan by the force of the stroke, he received a killing blow on the back of his head from the major's tremendous weapon. He recovered in a moment—the bull-headed scoundrel!—sufficiently to put out his hand and feebly grasp the scythe, but a furious rap of the major's stick nearly broke his arm, and he dropped the handle instantly. Nor was the major's help inopportune to Beauflower, for the red man had closed on him in despair at the cruel blows he received in the face, and had twisted round him his sinewy, bleeding, hairy arms. Had he not been drunk, he would have killed Beauflower long before. One savage stroke of the major's stick on the loins soon loosened him, but before he could rush at his new assailant, the major had bent his head, and dashing at O'Reilly like a wild ox, drove him, stunned and breathless, ten feet from where he had stood.

"Quick," he said, "Beauflower, lend me your handkerchief, that I may tie this fellow's arms

and legs before he recovers; you bind the other's with his own handkerchief, and guard them both while I run for the police. I saw Vincent as I passed the Everley Arms. The dirty blackguards! I wonder how they like it."

The Vicar did as required, then ran and knelt by Amy, and took her in his arms and felt her heart, and loosened her collar and kissed her passionately. Presently she opened her eyes, smiled at him as if in a dream, and fainted again. The major, who had tied the two men, with a good sharp kick each,—indeed, to tell the truth, rather more than one,—came up just as the Vicar's lips were pressed to Amy's.

"Musha!" he said to himself, "and so it's come to that, has it? There goes the last hope of Dominick Donovan. Well, must be must be, bad luck to it!"

"We'll make a lady's chair and carry her to the gig," said the Vicar; "we must take her home as soon as possible. Poor little bird, it has nearly frightened her to death."

"The little colleen! the little darlint!" said the major, as they bore her to the stile, still insensible. "If it had been in America, I'd have been sudden death on our two friends there. I'd have shot those fellows as if they had been mad dogs; hanging's too good for them. Bedad, the soil

here seems good for murder. Lord, how light this little creature is to carry! Bless her little heart!"

They had lifted Amy into the dog-cart and were just starting, when Dr. Briscoe and Mr. Goodrick drove up. They were told the story, to which they listened with profound attention. In a moment the worthy doctor was in the dog-cart, feeling Amy's pulse and heart, and assuring them of her speedy recovery. Mr. Goodrick's alarm was that of a father rather than a friend. The colour forsook his face as he helped the doctor to bear her to their brougham, where she could lean back against the cushions, till they could get restoratives. "I think it would kill me, Beauflower," he said, suddenly, "if anything was to happen to this girl; she has become almost necessary to my existence now."

"You get on the box of the doctor's brougham," said the major, "and I'll drive off like a tearing fury till I can find that Vincent, and then we'll look up our two friends and clap the bilboes on them, the dirty spalpeens. I wonder, now, I didn't kill one of them, bad cess to 'em! St. Patrick, the good man—bless his name to glory—didn't do half his work in clearing out the Irish vermin, but I suppose he'll draw them all off into fort'nate Amerikay one of these fine days.

Doctor, take care of the dear little colleen. I'll be back at tea-time to look after her."

The major was a Bohemian, a sponge, and a shifty, reckless fellow, but he was brave as a lion, and had a heart of gold. He kissed the little cold hand that hung down on the carriage seat with a chivalrous gallantry one could scarcely have expected from him, and then leaped up into his dog-cart.

"I must be off," he said, "or those blackguards will get away, and we shall have to chase them half over the county." Then lashing his smart little mare, and shouting a verse of "Garryowen," he drove off at a furious pace in search of P.-C. Vincent.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SERMON OF THE UNJUST STEWARD.

A DELICIOUS and serene tranquillity as of the golden age reigned over Summerleas on a Sunday. One would really have thought that Apollyon had never set his foot within twenty miles of it, and that even slander and petty larceny were unknown. Those persons who, as an old writer quaintly puts it, make Sunday a scraper to remove the dirt of the week, certainly did not contract any more very perceptible encrustation on that day. Calmly the day passed from the rose of dawn to the crimson of eve, calmly the hours flowed on like a silent river, till the to-day became yesterday, and passed out of sight. No jingle of waggon-horses going to water; no thronging crowd of smoking sheep driven through brown clouds of dust, to drink at the brook where it was widest, by the little grey bridge; no grind or jar of passing wain; no one, indeed, visible, except, perhaps, the carrier, weary of rest, trying his

terrier deprecatingly at a water-rat, or moodily watching the still water as if looking for a lost parcel. A little later, two or three hobbledehoys, stiff and awkward in their Sunday clothes, would be seen lounging on the bridge parapet, looking at a trout half hid in the long floating weeds, that occasionally rewarded the spectators by a glimpse of the extreme tip of his suspicious nose. As for the fresh-coloured children, deliciously clean in Sunday collar and cape, the school swallowed them after an early hour, and only released them to decanter them carefully into the church.

On the particular June Sunday we are humbly attempting to describe, the congregation had begun to collect early from the outlying farmers' cottages, chiefly in order to criticise the rather grand new headstone just erected by Mr. Harker to the memory of his faithful steward. It was a handsome slab of the best Tisbury stone, with a floriated cross on the top, filled with a text in red and black letters, of a totally unreadable shape, and it recorded the fifteen years' service and untiring energy of Mr. Travers, murdered by poachers, June 1, 1861. The sods over the barrel-shaped grave still showed the seams where they had been joined, and the flowers that the widow and children had stuck upon the still brownish turf, were scarcely faded. On the whole,

the stone was pronounced a downright handsome thing, that must have cost a tidy sight of money. Others, less easily pleased, did not care so much for the tombstone, but would rather have seen the squire take young Travers in his father's place, and have had less talked about and more done for the widow and children.

It was a sacred custom at Summerleas that the moment the first flutter of the parson's surplice was seen emerging from the Vicarage towards the path across the glebe, that that instant (like rabbits in a warren at the sight of a terrier), every smock-frock gathered in the churchyard, at the stile, or at the church doors, should instantly make a dive at the porch. Whether the object was to conceal the previous gossip, or to secure a good seat, is unknown, but such was the primeval custom. It had never been deviated from. The labouring men wore chiefly that national but irrational dress, the white smock, which, cold, easily dirtied, and perishable, has only one recommendation, *i.e.*, its exquisite and even ostentatious cleanliness. But, alas! the white smock is passing like the old woman's witch-like scarlet cloak of twenty years ago; and even its illegitimate successor, the leaden-coloured smock, with the elaborate pleated throat-piece, is growing obsolete too; and after that, what *is* left for the rightly-consti-

tuted Conservative mind but universal suffrage and the Deluge? The special pride at Summerleas consisted of a sort of short shooting jacket, coat and gaiters. The last old farmer who held to top-boots, as a Trojan to his Palladium, had died some ten years before, and about the same time had died out the maid-servant's custom of always carrying the prayer-book carefully wrapped up in the clean square-folded pocket-handkerchief. So the times change, and we change with them.

There had been thunder in the night, but the heat was not less intense for that relief. The moss-rose over the Vicarage porch, stripped of some of its blossoms by the thunder and rain, had already revived, and was opening exquisite flowers that scattered the odours of paradise to the passing zephyr. The bees, tipsy with honey, were reeling over the beds of mignonette, from which the warm rain had scarcely yet exhaled. Mr. and Mrs. Robinson, who had walked over to Summerleas with the Vicar of Birdbrook, Bessie Chetwynd (the eldest), and Miss Chivers, to inquire for Amy, whose night's rest had nearly restored her, were enraptured with the Vicar's garden, which, rejoicing in the glory of summer, was now a jungle of blossom and a wilderness of sweets. "Such an effect of colour," Mr. Robinson said, "as

a bed of scarlet geraniums presented in the full sunshine, he had never before witnessed." Mrs. Robinson was placidly, Bessie Chetwynd girlishly, and Miss Chivers amiably, delighted.

They all moved on to the church exactly as the chiding "parson's bell" began to ring, sharply and petulantly. In went the white smocks, in scuffling haste; in ran the boys, ducking under the arms of the graver seniors; in tripped the pretty, neat, fresh-coloured servant girls. There were open benches at Summerleas, the ends rudely carved in the Hottentot taste of the Georgian era. According to some extraordinary and unmeaning tradition of the same dark age, the women sat on one side of the church, the men on the other. George's uncle, old Payne, the clerk, had already helped on the Vicar with his snowy-white starched surplice, and, heavily spectacled, placed himself in the official pew from whence he organized the service. The pretty, but affected, schoolmistress was seated at the harmonium. The squire's gallery was alone empty. The Harkers' gallery was situated in the chancel, on the side facing the pulpit. It was a long carpeted pew, with two rows of seats, and a stove at the end of it. Five of the commandments, written in gilt letters, on a large black board, were hung immediately over Mr. Harker's royal seat, whose back was parallel to the pulpit. The pride

of class and wealth was as palpable in that little village church, as it is (more's the pity) in most things English.

It had been the custom fifteen years before, or less, for a rude sort of village band to occupy the organ loft (the organ was a grinder, horrible to musical ears, and never in tune). The rude forefathers of the hamlet at that time scraped and trumpeted the rough doggerel of Tate and Brady, with dreadful emphasis, claiming for themselves the chief control of the whole service, and working out the anthem on an intolerable trombone, screeching clarionet, shrill flute, and growling bass viol, that would have sent Handel to Bedlam in half-an-hour. All this, Beauflower, by more tact and generalship than his somewhat impulsive nature generally displayed, had quietly and gradually reformed away, and a quiet, somewhat wheezy and nasal harmonium now reigned in their stead. Those conceited and overpowering musicians were relics of the pagan Georgian age, when a cracked slop basin was used for a font; when brown fungi grew between the chancel stones; when a poor hen had been found sitting on her eggs in the pulpit; and when old Payne's father, then a half paralyzed man, still proud of his authority, used to be carried on his son's back once in every service from the organ loft to his desk, and, if necessary, sounding

a loud "amen" during his brief Anchises journey, while the rector, on dark days, had been known to get down from the pulpit and stand up at a chancel window to finish his sermon.

Things now were more severe and more decorous. Beauflower read the prayers neither coldly nor theatrically, but in a fine sonorous voice, and with the earnestness of a man who felt he was addressing Deity itself. There was no fantastic shifting of dresses or places; no superstitious bowings and candle lightings; no popish genuflexions; no assumption of the follies of the bygone idolatrous priestcraft.

On this particular Sunday the Vicar felt a little nervous, because all eyes were fixed on him with special admiration and curiosity, and there were strangers from outlying villages who had come purposely to see the man who had so bravely rescued Miss Robinson from the drunken and savage Irishmen, who were on the Monday to be brought before the Fontford magistrates. With the recital of this adventure had somehow oozed out a rumour that the Vicar was courting Miss Robinson, and that lent a romantic zest to the story which would otherwise have been wanting.

So it was that the service to the Summerleas people had that day a peculiar and dramatic interest, and every one, even before the "Dearly be-

loved brethren" sounded forth, was very silent and stared very hard, longing for the Harkers and the rescued damsel to arrive. The harmonium had already begun a low breathing voluntary in a minor key, when the Vicar ruffled in, took his seat in the reading-desk, and buried his face in his hands to implore God's blessing on his prayers and exhortations. He had just raised his head, and was looking over the Psalms, when there was a sound of quick wheels at the churchyard gate, and a minute or two afterwards the gallery door was opened, and Mrs. Harker, Miss Harker, and Ethel entered, followed by Mr. Harker and a footman, who carried some costly-looking books.

The Vicar cast one look at the pew, which everyone observed, and coloured slightly when he saw that Amy had been evidently too weak to come. The Robinsons whispered: the Vicar gave one glance round the church.

He had somewhat of an artist's eye, and it dwelt with pleasure on one or two fine old bald-headed, grey-haired patriarchs, whose hard, shrewd old visages came out well against the grey wall of the side aisle, and contrasted with the fresh boyish faces, and pretty little bonneted heads, gay with broad streaming ribbons, that glowed like flowers amid the general blankness and negation of colour. Good old Brown, who generally

made it a practice to stand during the whole of the sermon, was conspicuous beside Mr. Pitts in the front row, behind the clerk, looking very respectable in his Sunday dress; his rosy good-natured face, serene, shrewd, and untroubled as ever. Beside him sat his handsome scapegrace of a son, looking rather worn and dissipated, his eyes rather sodden, and with a suspicious red mark on his left collar-bone, which might have occurred from a scuffle at the skittle ground, or The Peal of Bells, the night before; but was charitably considered at home to be "a fall."

The Vicar was just repeating that fine prayer—

"Almighty and most merciful Father, we have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts,—"

When Mr. Goodrick entered by a little postern door in the chancel, stepping softly, reverentially, and deprecatingly; standing a moment with his face hidden by his hat, he took out his prayer-book, and knelt beside Mrs. and Miss Beauflower. The lessons were well read by the Vicar of Bird-brook, a portly, good-natured looking man, in a colloquial, but sensible manner.

How seldom clergymen read well, and how ignorant they are of that management of breath that the actor and the barrister so thoroughly

acquire. The first lesson was that fine dramatic chapter about Gehazi, and the only interruptions were those of an old man, near the pulpit, who commented upon Gehazi's conduct in an audible way, as for instance, when the prophet's greedy servant answered, "I went no whither," the old man would say, "that's a lie," but very few smiled, as they were accustomed to the commentator.

Old Payne was not a bad specimen of the village clerk; but, still, at every response he went off, like wound-up clockwork, with a sort of nasal whiz, and in a high entirely artificial voice, and his

A-R-R-R—MEN!

was a recitative dangerously ludicrous to strangers at all susceptible of the ludicrous. The first hymn was given out.

"Let us sing to the praise and glory of God, the Thirty-Seventh Psalm," (Tate and Brady;—wonderful Tate and Brady!)

"Though wicked men grow rich and great,
Yet let not their successful state
Thy anger or thy envy raise:
For they, cut down like tender grass,
Or like young flowers away shall pass,
Whose blooming beauty soon decays.

"Depend on God, and him obey;
So thou within the land shalt stay,
Secure from danger and from want

Make his commands thy chief delight:
And He, thy duty to requite,
Shall all thy earnest wishes grant."

As the Vicar stood up and joined in the psalm, which was sung with, perhaps, rather more vigour than taste, his eye slightly quailed before the fishy glare of that of Mr. Pitts, who, glossy in a suit of shoddy black, bought ready made from some Jewish advertising tailor (he was a distant relative of Travers), and with a large rose in his button-hole, eyed Beauflower, as much as to say,—

"All this is very well, you are good, and you are plucky, but still you owe me 17*l.* 9*s.* 4½*d.* for the last quarter's meat, since Lady Day."

The Vicar felt the chain Pitts held and pulled, and lamented the degradation and slavery of debt. Even at God's altar the horrible *pieuvre* was clasping him closer with a more deadly grip.

An impression had spread through the parish, and reports spread quickly in small places, that the Vicar was going to preach, that last Sunday in June, a sort of funeral sermon upon Travers; that report had filled the church, and roused the utmost curiosity, for the spot of the murder had already become a place of Sunday pilgrimage for the people of Summerleas and the neighbourhood, and the hope of discovering the murderer was now all but abandoned. The hush, therefore, was

very deep when old Payne assisted the Vicar in the chancel, with his black silk gown and the crimson Oxford M.A. scarf that heraldically barred it behind, and deeper when the clerk gave out, in a high quavering voice, the Thirty-Sixth Psalm.

> "My crafty foe, with flatt'ring art,
> His wicked purpose would disguise;
> But reason whispers to my heart,
> He ne'er sets God before his eyes.
>
> "He soothes himself, retir'd from sight,
> Secure he thinks his treach'rous game;
> Till his dark plots, expos'd to light,
> Their false contriver brand with shame."

Just as the full body of praise began to swell forth under the old roof, the Vicar gravely mounted the creaking pulpit stairs, and knelt down in prayer. In the moment's lull when the psalm ended, and every one subsided into his seat, the swallows could be heard under the eaves of the porch, the starlings on the roof, and the thrush singing on the larch tree in the glebe.

The Vicar gave out his text, with unaffected solemnity, and as if he was really repeating the inspired words of Christ himself.

"The sixteenth chapter of Saint Luke, and the eighth verse.

"'And the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely; for the children of

this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.'"

Mrs. Harker gave the Vicar a searching and vindictive glance, of which the earnest speaker was entirely unconscious.

The Vicar began by drawing a picture of the unjust steward, whose commendation seemed to come so strangely from the lips of Christ.

"Let us picture this man," he said, "who grinds the faces of the poor, and is flinty-hearted to the widow and the orphan, rejoicing over his bales of Syrian silks, his stores of pearls from Ormuz, and frankincense from Arabia, as he paces his marble court, where the fountain plays among the flowering pomegranate trees; proud and defiant, he is waiting till twilight come, and brings the guests who are to share his splendour, and minister to his vanity. His granaries brim with corn, his cellars with oil and wine; he has treasure laid up for many years; the Roman Consul seats him by his side in the amphitheatre, at the solemn sacrifices in which renegades share, in order to win favour with the oppressors of his country. He sates his every fancy. Care and trouble glower at his gilded gate, but cannot enter. He wastes his master's goods, and there is no one to say 'nay.' He is swollen with prosperity and gluttony. Whatever he touches turns

to gold. He sleeps on rose-leaves while his ministers, Cunning, Fraud, Double-Dealing, and Oppression, torture his master's tenants, and drag them to lower and lower misery, want and death. But God does not sleep, his sword, the lightning, rests not ever in its scabbard. His angels do neither slumber nor sleep. A chariot suddenly rolls up to the gate, and a clear stern voice cries,—

"'How is it that I hear this of thee? Give an account of thy stewardship: for thou mayest be no longer steward.'

"The enchanted world of self-delusion in which he has been living, melts in a moment into air. Escaping, perhaps, the blood red rods and the terrible cross, he finds himself a disgraced beggar, who will have to supplicate the leper at the gate and the madman among the tombs for a handful of dates or a shred of meat. He will be driven into the desert among the hyænas and the sand-asps. What does this bad man do? Does he destroy himself in wild despair and revenge, making a vast funeral pile of the wealth on which he has been ravening? No; Self is still his god, Satan furnishes him with new wiles and stratagems. He calls together the alarmed debtors, and propitiates them so as to earn shelter and patronage now the storm bursts. The debt of one hundred measures of oil he reduces to fifty,

the hundred measures of wheat to fourscore. The lord, discovering the stratagem which had crowned dishonesty by dishonesty, commended the unjust steward because in his generation he had made friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, and had been wiser than the children of light. We do not, however, hear that the rascal escaped companionship with the thief, the leper, and the dweller among the tombs; we only know his master praised his promptitude and energy in the emergency.

"How like the world—"

Mr. Goodrick, who sat opposite the royal pew, had kept his eyes steadily fixed on Mr. Harker. At the first giving out of the text his face had become suffused with red, which deepened and deepened as the sermon proceeded. Several times he had uneasily changed his position; now, with his hand over his eyes; now, with his head resting on his hand, so as to shut himself out from the more curious of the congregation. At this part of the sermon his face had suddenly assumed a death-like pallor, and Mrs. Harker, alarmed at his appearance, had violently awoke her elder daughter, who was in her first sleep and looked peculiarly bony and very red about the nose, and had passed a large double smelling-bottle to her husband, who had angrily repelled it.

"How like the world," continued the unconscious Vicar, resolute in his conscious rectitude, "prompt to evil, slow to good. How soon the tradesman learns to dilute and adulterate. How soon the buyer learns to take advantage of the ignorance or haste of the seller. How soon the seller learns to watch for the unpractised or careless buyer? How the man of the world tries to profit by the passions or weaknesses of his neighbour, and to trade on his fear, anger, pride, extravagance, or vice? Do not honesty, good faith, generosity, honour, seem to have abandoned the world in disgust? Everywhere we see the same greedy, insane, selfish race for wealth, one by one, the brutal, trampling, rushing crowd, attracts us, and crushing and goring we hurry on, without a thought for the dying under our feet, all jostling and tearing each other down for the golden prize. The greed for hasty wealth maddens us all, we still hurry onward, demon-led, and the weak and the noble perish first.

"We are all stewards of God's goods; of health, of wisdom, of time, of life. Our Lord will come at midnight, suddenly, and demand an account of those gifts. Who is the unjust steward? Each one thinks he has had so little entrusted to him. I will tell you who the unjust steward is. He is the ploughman who ploughs half an acre a day,

when he could easily plough a whole acre. He is the blacksmith, who consciously leaves a flaw in the horse-shoe he sells. He is the shepherd who lets a lamb die from cold, when he could have saved it by conscientious care. He is the carter who lets a horse fall ill from not covering it when it is hot. Nor should I be doing my duty as a minister of God if I did not tell you who was the unjust steward among the wealthy also and the powerful. The unjust steward is the employer who has no sympathies with his workmen, and does not guard their interests as his own; the clergyman who lets his people die unpitied and without prayer; the landlord who treats his tenants merely as brute beasts, serfs to toil and then to die, he who, giving them only just enough to support life, surrounds them with the temptations of stealable food, and then drives them to gaol and the hulks if poor human nature succumb, in a weak moment, to the almost irresistible allurement; the landlord who leaves his labourers to end a toilsome life in the stone-yard of the workhouse; who——"

Here the sermon was for a moment interrupted by a door slamming violently. It was the door of the Harker gallery. Mr. Harker had left the church. Mr. Goodrick smiled. Mrs. Beauflower and Julia looked alarmed.

The Vicar went on boldly, and sketched the bad landlord to his remorseful and unpitied end. But it is alien to our purpose to follow the Vicar further in his sermon. It ended with an exhortation to all to be as prompt for good, as the unjust steward was for evil, and, despising the world's cross, to strive hard for the eternal crown.

The prayer was said; slowly the usual scuffling noise of exit began, and the congregation left the church.

"Thank you, Muster Beauflour, for very good doctrine," said Farmer Brown, according to his invariable custom, with a gentle slap on the Vicar's back.

"A very searching and uncompromising sermon," said the rector of Birdbrook to Beauflower, in his hearty frank way, as they walked to the Vicarage across the glebe meadow. "Did you observe Mr. Harker leave his pew? I'm afraid he was taken ill."

"No doubt he was; he has not looked himself lately. I'll send George, after evening church, to inquire for him."

"By the bye, Beauflower," said the rector, "we had a committee meeting at my place on Thursday, the day you went to London. I had almost forgotten to tell you that the archdeacon and all of us decided that as all the subscriptions are

now in we had better meet to-morrow week, and send Mrs. Chetwynd's lawyer the whole sum, the whole £180; and now I am going to surprise you. You know that we wanted to try and pay that extra £80 demanded for the useless old barn that Mr. Chetwynd pulled down?"

"Yes. I was wondering how we could wind up so soon."

"As you might naturally do. But while the committee was sitting, in came an anonymous letter, enclosing the £80, so we are now all square, and the poor widow will be free of this cruel burden."

Beauflower expressed his delight and his astonishment. Who could be the unknown benefactor? Surely not Mr. Harker, who had always set his face like a flint against this work of mercy, not Mr. Goodrick, surely, for there he walked in front of them, unconscious and indifferent, though he could not fail hearing scraps of their conversation.

"Well," said Julia Beauflower to her old enemy, "and is the wonderful house any nearer completion than it has been these last two months?"

"My dear Julia," said her mother, "don't be so rude to Mr. Goodrick. I am sure he is very good-natured to bear it."

"Bear it, my dear madam? I like it; it is as

refreshing as hail, and it falls off me with equal rapidity.—Yes, my dear Miss Beatrice, the wonderful house, it will comfort you to know, was reported finished yesterday, and I go in in a fortnight. It is to be full of books, and pictures, and curiosities, and is to be very comfortable, as you will see when you and Mrs. Beauflower do me the honour of visiting me there. I wish to consult your taste, Mrs. Beauflower, about my curtains, and one or two other material things."

"I suppose those horrid rascals will get three months' hard labour?" said the rector of Birdbrook.

"They ought to be hung," said Beauflower.

"Yes, that they ought," said Julia, her eye flashing soft lightning.

"By the bye," said Mr. Goodrick, turning round abruptly to the Vicar, (the ladies had gone on, only hearing,) "wern't you talking about the Chetwynds?"

"Yes, we were."

"I wish I could have given more. But, upon my word, I'm for once rather with Harker,—I object on principle to sympathy with such shameful improvidence. Here's a man going on for years with a fair but unimproveable income of £300 a year. He pockets all the money he receives for dilapidations, wastes it on expen-

sive old books, and such nonsense, does not lay by one farthing, casts away all thought of the uncertainty of life—though every day called to some death-bed or another—makes no provision for his wife and two children, except a trumpery little insurance, then dies, and leaves them to beg about the country. Ugh! I have no patience with such men."

"I think you're a little too hard on poor Chetwynd," said Beauflower, with a guilty toleration for his own sins. "Some men are so child-like, and sanguine, so hopeful, and so incapable of business method and foresight, that sometimes from early habits of lavishness, sometimes from not resisting impulses, still oftener from sheer want of a certain faculty, they can never learn providence or economy."

"Small weeds, in fact," said Goodrick, bitterly; "why, my dear fellow, you're begging the question. It is exactly the habit of not checking bad impulses, and not encouraging good ones, that I condemn. If man is unimproveable, he is not better than Mr. Darwin's great-grandfather—the gorilla. If he is improveable, he can fight his way to the angels."

"I would rather starve," thought the Vicar, angrily, "than ask that man for anything; he is flint to the back bone."

"I think you said you were going to London, Beauflower, on Friday week?" said Mr. Goodrick, as they parted at the Vicarage gate, where Wasp awaited them with all sorts of pretty cringing flattery and yelping delight.

"Yes, I am—if all goes well. I am going to spend two days with Fairfield."

"Then would you take up those jewels of mine to Mr. Albert Hoffman, the agent for the Prussian Exhibition, in Austin Friars. They are too valuable to trust to any one but a friend. They *must* be with him by the twentieth."

"With the greatest pleasure."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEVIL'S SNUFF-BOX.

It was the day before Cottenham races, and three days before Slobury races, and there was the din of great preparation in the stable yard at Swallowcliff Castle, for Immenschikoff was just starting for the Warminster station, under convoy of Mr. Bassevi, the major, and Paddy Blake, now promoted, to his infinite pride and delight, to be odd man at the Cantelupe stables. Immenschikoff having run "a good horse" at Salisbury, his enraptured owner (poor boy!) mad about him, had him guarded like a queen of the harem. No touts were admitted to see him, even at his gallop; no photographs were allowed to be taken of him for fear of drugging. Paddy, indeed, mounted guard day and night, and would almost have shot any suspicious interloper. Cantelupe had forgiven Harker his sharp practice at Bibury directly because it had been unsuccessful; and Mrs. Harker still had matrimonial hopes for

Carry, when time had taught the young gentleman humility. Ah! clever, pushing, hopeful, energetic Mrs. Harker, you little knew where his first thoughts had wandered, and still less did you know the path taken by his second. The schemer was too intent on her own narrow aims to look at the outer circles of the target. A target is not all gold; and those who don't touch the red may sometimes hit the white.

The major, though commander-in-chief for Bassevi, who was intent on purchasing some of Cantelupe's family Vandykes, was ignorant of the plot he was brewing, and was only an unconscious agent in the racing business.

The major, we again assert, was tremendous. There he was in the great paved square stable-yard of Swallowcliff Castle, shouting to the grooms who, in the absence of old Mr. Dawson, the head groom,—who was confined to his bed with gout, (the old family port was far too easily accessible at the castle,)—were now as well disciplined and orderly as usual. There was Paddy, too, still in his scarlet coat (that he would no more part with than a king with his coronation robe,) but with decent trowsers and shoes on, and a bran new black velvet hunting-cap, that had been rather too tight for Mr. Cantelupe.

There were grooms scouring bits and snaffles

boys rubbing bridoons and cheek straps; men upon all fours washing the wheels and rubbing the panels of a dark-blue and a bright-yellow drag, two vehicles which were to be raced to Salisbury that very afternoon. The eight horses were to be put to at half-past three, and it wanted already only a quarter to the hour.

It was owing to the exaggerated nature of the major, and not arising from any natural or national diffidence, that whatever he had to do he assumed a power above and below his commission. If he had had an artillery waggon to drive, he would instantly have ordered a general charge of cavalry up the Pyrenees; if he had been appointed head bottle-washer at the Board of Trade, he would instantly have declared war on the United States. So it was now, that although chosen only to superintend the journeys of Immenschikoff, till after he had run for the Bibury races, the major assumed all the airs of a master of a stud; an Osbaldiston, Gully, Lord Glasgow, and Mr. M'George, rolled into one. If bawling and railing was to earn his money, he certainly was earning it. The grooms, though secretly cursing and reviling him, openly trembled; Paddy eyed him with humorous approval and awe ineffable.

"Look alive there, you impident shtrap," he called out to one of the boy helpers, "or I'll rub

you down with this oak towel. Why, the horses won't be ready this twelvemonth? I'll show you who I am, Tam Johnson, though ye do keep winking at Paddy there enough to knock an omnibus over. There's you and that other devil's limb of a boy you're only fit to keep each other company on the treadmill for stealing oats, and then there'd be a pair of ye, as the devil said to his knee-buckles. You're afraid of work, Tam, and work's afraid of you, that's what it is, you omadhaun. Here, let me have a rub at the panels, you only keep looking at your own ugly gallows-bird face in them."

Then the major fell to at the dark blue panels, singing as he rubbed, till his face grew as red as beet-root.

"In beauteous spring birds do sing,
And cheer each myrtle shade,
And shepherd swains serenade the plains,
To find their lambs that strayed.
Nigh Roden's grove I chanced to rove,
To take a rurial walk,
When to my sight appeared in white
The star of sweet Dundalk."

The major all at once stopped to rate the sharp boy who, thinking singing the order of the day, had, during this Dublin street ditty, commenced on his own responsibility to hum,

"My love he was a carpenter, only nineteen years old,"

"Musha, bad luck to your impidence. If yir

don't stop that caterwaulin, saltpetre wont save you, and that's a shtrong pickle. You boys there, come put the horses to smartly, the master will be here directly, he's only giving out some champagne to mix with his boot blacking, and 'deed there's nothing comes near it for mixing, for it's a sociable liquor;—Here, somebody tell the lads who're going behind in the dicky to get their boots on. You Paddy, run, you're the nimblest after all. Jack, my lad, lend us a puff of your dudheen out here, it's dangerous smoking in a stable full of straw, though it may be insured. Hand it over, you villain, and then bring out the two greys, the darlints.

"'Then the mortal gods dhrink their nectar wine,
And they tell me claret is very fine,
But I'd give them all, just in a bunch,
For one big pull at a jug of punch.
Toor-a-loo, toor-a-loo, toor-a-loo, fol-lol-de-rholl,
A jug of punch! a jug of punch!
Oh! more power to your elbow, my jug of punch!!'

"Pull that leg after you quicker, Tom. One would think you'd been in irons, and could not forget it. You are like all your Wiltshire people, they all walk like flies in honey. They always fancy they've got a hundredweight of clay on their shoes, bad cess to 'em, but whisht, boys, here's the master, and I mustn't be seen demaning myself any longer with hard work."

Swallowcliff Castle was a large, grand, dull-

looking stone building, the work of Inigo Jones. The stables lay in the direction of the gardens, to the left of the main building, and were approached by a covered passage leading past the kitchens. Down this passage, Cantelupe and half-a-dozen of his sponging sporting friends appeared, a few minutes after the court-yard clock had struck three. They looked rather flushed and excited, and two or three of them held billiard cues in their hands, whose tips ever and anon they screwed into pieces of squeaking chalk. There was old puffy Major Filby, very red in the face, and with very stiff knees. There was Jack Talbot imperturbably cold and crafty, pricking with his penknife a cigar that would not draw. There was Captain Monsoon, a thirsty, crusty old Indian, a dead hand at cards, and young Chipway of the Guards, who had stood very heavily against Immenschikoff at Bibury. One or two trainers, very horsey and livery-stably in dress and manners, Bassevi, and a young friend of Bassevi's, who had also come down to lend money, completed the party of hawks, vultures, and crows, encircling the one big gull. Cantelupe, who carried a cue over his shoulder, and was smoking a cigar as large as a small fife, began directly talking to the major in a pleasant and affable way, but with an occasional hiccup.

"Well, major," he said, "and how's Immen-

schikoff looking? Will he run a good horse. Will he pull it off?"

"Divil doubt him," replied the major, with the confidence of a tried warrior. "See him strike out with the off hind leg in yesterday's gallop, and you'd lay your life on him. 'Yellow jacket's sure to win.' Three cheers, boys! I'll put all I got on him. Would I do that if I hadn't faith in him? Tom, gently there with those horses."

"And as quick as you like," said Cantelupe. "We've got a match on, major, I and Major Filby, which will drive to Salisbury market-place and back in the fewest minutes. There's a good deal on, so mind the fellows have the traces all snug, and everything up to the right hole."

"Any touts been sneaking about, major?" said Talbot, looking inconceivably knowing and cunning, as he held his head aside to watch the major, who was waving his hand to the men who were hauling at the second drag, and bringing out the bays to harness.

"If any come, pump on them, my boy," said Filby, "I always told them to at Lord Bogmire's, it benefits touts morally, and, by Gad, physically too, for they generally want washing."

"There was one of those Yorkshire rascals from Harker's here this morning, almost before we were up," said the major, addressing himself more

especially to Bassevi and Cantelupe, and rather ignoring Filby, who, when not fulsome was offensive, and who was eyeing the canary-coloured drag rather contemptuously; "he wanted to see Immenschikoff."

"But he didn't?" said Cantelupe eagerly, and for him rather suspiciously.

"Not he; not for Joseph, oh no, no, not if he knows it. No, we wouldn't let even the tip of his nose into the yard, so then he got riled and wanted to fight Paddy, who, he said, was a spy, and had told us all the secrets of his master's stables, and he called me a bagman, and if he hadn't backed out directly, begor I'd have knocked the head off him. The dirty blackgyard, he was up to no good, I take it, but he won't come here again."

"Would you fellows who've laid me odds like to see the animal?" said Cantelupe, speaking loud and firmly by a great effort, his usual tone of voice being that of a sick lion.

"Immensely," said Filby. Then all the rest said, "Yes, by Jove," or "thanks, very much; trot him out, Fitz."

"Bring out Immenschikoff, d'ye hear there," shouted the major, in his commander-in-chief manner, and two grooms instantly ran into the stable to bring out the favourite.

"By the bye," said Cantelupe to one of the grooms who was busy at the yellow drag, "did you ride over early to the Abbey, as I told you, to ask for Miss Robinson?"

"Yes, sir," said the man, touching his hat. "I went, sir, and Miss Robinson is much better to-day."

"Jack," said Cantelupe to Talbot aside, "I'd take that girl now with only a thousand, by George I would, and think myself lucky too."

"I couldn't do it at the figure, Fitz," said Talbot, "but I think I might sacrifice myself to the Harker girl for ten."

"I was just saying to Monsoon, old fellow," said Filby to Cantelupe, in his most gushing manner, "that, by Jove, I didn't think there was a fellow in all the mortal world knew as much about horses as you do. There's no getting to windward of you. There's no putting you in the hole, as I told Lord Mazagan the other day, when I met him at Trotterley's."

"Come none of that, Fil," said Cantelupe, "you are going to let me in, you know you are."

"No, 'pon my soul, I'm not. I wish I could, eh, Shivy. You're a deuced deal too dodgey for me."

"And how are you, Paddy?" said Cantelupe, going up in a pleasant sort of way to Pat, who

was stroking down one of the four greys in the blue drag, "why, you look something like a sportsman now. Put any money on Immenschikoff?"

"Put money on, sir, why I'd put a hatful if I had it. I know you always run your horses on the square, and this is a topper. I shall put the pot on him, your honour. There never was such a horse, and I'll risk fifteen crowns on him."

"Then put that too, Paddy," said Cantelupe, handing the enthusiast a five pound note out of his portmonnaie, "and mind you keep a good guard over him."

"Lord bless your kind heart!" said Paddy, his eyes kindling with delight as he made half a hundred bows, "no tout shall get near him, unless he hides in a cobweb, or comes down in the small rain. Ah! here's the beauty. A pound to a shilling on the pet of the Cantelupe stables. Any one bet?"

"Do you think Fitz is run hard?" said Filby, aside to Bassevi, who was watching the scene as a carrion crow watches a sick lamb. "They say he's positively head over ears."

"Well, he's going the pace," answered Bassevi, cautiously, "but the estate is a good estate, and if he marries Miss Harker, he'll pull in."

The appearance of Immenschikoff stopped the

conversation. The favourite was a showy, rather leggy golden chestnut, with three white stockings, light below the knee, and tapering far too much from his arm to the ground; his hocks were rather straight and weak, and his high withers denoted an inability to stay.

"Good for a short distance," whispered Filby to Bassevi.

"Very short," whispered Bassevi back, "not my style—but still he can go."

"Too heavy in the shoulder," whispered Monsoon to Talbot.

"Back ribs too light," whispered Chipway.

"Turns out his toes," said one dealer to the other.

Then aloud. "Ten pounds better than when I saw him last," said Filby.

"Very game horse," said Monsoon.

"Immense," observed Talbot.

"Beat everything," cried Bassevi.

"Jimmy Jackson says he never crossed such a horse," said Cantelupe, much pleased at the unanimous outburst of admiration. "He's immensely fast, and he's got the pluck of a lion when he's called on. If he was a little closer knit I would not part with him for four thousand guineas."

"Isn't his shoulder a trifle loaded, Fitz?" said Filby, thoughtfully.

"I don't see it, Fil, but then love is blind. What do you say, Jack?"

"Not a bit—fine animal, cut them all down. Still, Fitz, I shall go in for the field, just for variety."

"And so will I," said Filby, "but I tell you all frankly, it is an A 1 horse, and I don't think anything can stop him winning; but there would be no sport if we are all on one side."

"That's what I say," remarked Chipway, "and how we shall be put in the hole if he goes the tremendous bat he did at Salisbury."

These birds of prey had their claws deep in the wool of this sick sheep, and the moment the destined time came for him to roll on his back, they would all be at his eyes at once.

"I tell you what, Fitz," said Filby, his eyes red and projecting with a good deal too much smoking, and rather too much of the eau-de-vie (or eau-de-mort, the esoteric name it goes by in its own place), "I tell you what, Fitz, my boy, the ladies will never forgive us if we send off this superb animal without their seeing it."

"A good idea," said Cantelupe. "Major, be kind enough to have Immenschikoff brought round to the drawing-room windows before his body clothes are put on. The ladies will want to see him."

"Bless their hearts," said the gallant major. "Paddy, you and I will take him round; mind he doesn't slip on the stones, or you'd better be under the daisy carpet at once ma bouchal."

"Right you are, sir," said Paddy, proud of the responsibility.

"I really believe, Jack," said Cantelupe to Talbot, as they trooped back to the house, "that that Paddy fellow would lay down his life for me or Immenschikoff."

"Decent sort of a blackguard," said Jack. "But I dare say he'd sell you and the horse, and his own mother, for another fiver."

"Well, I haven't such a bad opinion of people. It is very easy to get a reputation for learyness by suspecting every one, but I really don't seem to see things in that light."

"But you will when you've cut down the last oak in the avenue," thought Talbot.

A few minutes after Immenschikoff came round. He really looked well when stripped—muscular, alert, and reasonably well bred, but his eyes were small and distrustful, and it was as much as Paddy could do to lead him, even with the major as commander-in-chief.

The owner, Filby, Bassevi, and the other sponges, toadies, and sharks, were all gathered at the window, with here and there some bold,

pretty, shameless faces, amongst whom a pink bonnet and a little black hat, with a scarlet tuft of feathers, were not least conspicuous. They were all laughing, nodding, and "carrying on," and every one held aloft a broad-mouthed glass of creaming champagne, which they tossed off to the health and success of Immenschikoff, while Bassevi's lurid, wicked, and melancholy eyes gloated silently on the scene.

Cantelupe suddenly threw up the window and handed the major and Paddy each a foaming glass.

"Drink this fizz," he said, "major, and then please be off at once, or you'll miss the 5.30 at Warminster. Immenschikoff must get to Cottenham to-night. Walk him quietly, and look out for the touts—I hear they're after him. Mr. Bassevi will ride with you. Now, then, you fellows, let's toss for the choice of drags."

The major drank the champagne, bowed to the ladies with the gallantry of a stage nobleman, Paddy gave a scream of triumph, everybody cheered, and Immenschikoff started off.

* * * *

Immenschikoff reached Warminster a little before 5 p.m. He was immured safely in a horse box, not without some vicissitudes of temper, and a lively, but ineffectual, attempt to dispose of the

major and to kill Paddy. The van was shunted to a siding, attached to some empty second-class carriages, and left nearly opposite the open door of the time-keeper's shed. There was no one at the station but the newspaper boy at the book stall, a railway porter, and two countrymen. One of these two was a gamekeeper, not a tawny, frosty gamekeeper, reddened by weather, but a pale-looking, dissipated keeper, with a rough red beard, and a wide-a-wake low over his eyes. He wore the usual stained brown velveteen jacket and rusty leggings, and held a long ash stick in his hand, like a spear rather than a walking stick. The man with him, also rather pale, had big black whiskers, wore a dirty, leaden-coloured smock, and had a flag basket, like a carpenter's, on his shoulder. They were pacing mopily up and down, waiting for the Bath train.

"Don't let him be a moment out of sight, major," said Bassevi, as the two men turned into the refreshment-room, "and I'll go and have a drain; I'm parched up with all that infernal pop."

"Ah! it can't put a patch on the Charlemagne," said the major, "you should taste that, my boy, that's the stuff; by the piper that played before Moses, it bangs Bannagher. It is something to remember, Shiv."

Bassevi, the moment he entered the refreshment-room, turned round, gave a look down the platform and a look up, then walked straight to the counter where the two men stood, and winked with a look of diabolical cunning. The conversation was curt.

"Got the stuff?" said the pseudo keeper.

"All right—here in this wiper," and Bassevi pulled out a red handkerchief, containing two of those dry, brown, puff fungi that the Wiltshire gipsies call "the devil's snuff-boxes." Their seed is a fine snuff-coloured pungent dust, highly poisonous, and capable of growing inside the person or animal who swallows it, doing no harm for some days, but shortly swelling and spreading its fibres into all the chief vessels till death ensues in about a week, unless aromatic vinegar (the only antidote) is given in time.

Bassevi shook out a little of the subtle dust, to show that it was there, then knotted up the handkerchief and thrust it into the second man's ready basket.

"That'll do the trick, Monty," he said. "Keep your eyes open. When are the niggers coming?"

"They're due now, Shiv. We'll be all there when they come. Draw your two fellows off to them directly, and keep between them and the

horse-box. Mind, Shiv, you share the swag square as we did with the white sauce."

"Good—come let me shout. Here, Mary, three sixes of pale brandy, and smart, my girl."

The brandy was served—the best and firiest potato spirit—the three men tossed it down; at that moment a fellow with a painted face, large false nose, conical hump, and dirty-striped red and white Punch dress, entered from the street by the glass-door, followed by four other men, dressed as nigger minstrels, with banjos, bones, and tambourines. They came in chattering their sham talk, the Irishman asserting himself strongly through the lamp black; their coarse lips very red, their eyes very white, their wigs very woolly.

"Here we are again. How do, jebblemen—how are you to-morrow. Here, my lovely Loosy, five threes neat of gin, and here's the ready.

The two first men exchanged looks, and whispered to Punch.

"Our little game is on the far right end of the platform, keep 'em going while we do the doctoring."

"Right ye are," screamed Punch. "Darkies, are you all outside your liquor? Well then, strike up. 'I once knew a nigger, and his name was Uncle Ned.' I'll do the patter. Now alto-

gether. Rootle, tootle, rottle, rooooootle. Take your seats, jebblemen, here's the limited express; take your seats, darkies, in the night mail north."

As they moved to the platform, singing and playing, preceded by the ribald grimacing fellow in the Punch dress, who cut the strangest capers and fandangoed about like a musical conductor gone mad on the subject of dancing, at the end of every verse, Bones, a man with a melancholy serious face, and enormous large sharp shirt collars, executed a sort of fantastic waltz opposite the signal shed, where the points were. The tambourine player beat his head, elbow, knees, and toes, with his instrument; Bones rioted in rattling ecstasies.

"Now then, Jack the Giant Collar," screamed Punch, "give us the last kick out as patronised by the royal family. The jebblemen of the long robe object to the short dresses of the ballet dancers, but they can't get hold of us, Mr. Bones, that's a consolation. I say, Bones, do you know the best motto for a bottle of hair dye?"

"Give it up, Mr. Punch," said Bones, after rolling his eyes horribly.

"Now don't you tell—the best motto for a bottle of hair dye, Bones, is—*Keep it dark!* Yah, yah, yah, rootle, tootle, rooooootle. Now

then, darkies, let's have a sentimental chant. Bones, you've got a beautiful tenor, please to take round the hat, and then give us

> "Come where my love lies dreaming,
> Dreaming the happy hours away;"

or, if the musical pitch is so altered that you can't pitch into it no how, and the key of the front door is lost by Mr. Sims Reeves, please to oblige us, Bones, with that high feluting, and very charming song—

> "The mocking bird sits singing on the tree,
> The mocking bird: hark! 'tis the mocking bird,
> O the mocking bird sits singing on the tree."

By this time, by a sure and irresistible magnetism, the major and Paddy had been drawn almost imperceptibly to Bassevi's side, with their backs to the horse-box, towards which the keeper and his man had gradually and quite as imperceptibly sidled.

"Now then, my jolly blackbirds, sing me 'the Rakes of Mallow,'" shouted the major, "and, bedad, I'll stand glasses round to the health of ould Ireland."

There was a moment's pause. Punch whispered to Bones, and then to one of the banjo players, who instantly began the song, with an irrestrainable Cork brogue, the rest chiming in in rather a

lame chorus, for they scarcely knew the tune, and certainly not the words. The major was delighted, Paddy was in ecstasies. Bassevi turned and gave the signal, three coughs. The audience had no eyes or ears but for the singers, even the pointsman had joined the crowd.

That moment the keeper's man leaped lightly up on the horse-box, rested on the wheel, cried out, for fear he should be seen, "Why, Jack, look here's Immenschikoff, you never saw him before;"—and thrust a bit of hay, filled with the deadly gipsy powder, into the snapping and ready jaws of the heedless horse.

As the two men again joined the crowd, carelessly joining in the chorus, the major called out to Paddy,—

"Run and order glasses round, I'll pay the piper. It's ten minutes now to the train, and I'll go back and keep guard on Immenschikoff. He's not safe for a moment. I know these tout fellows and there may be some here. Put your best leg forward, Paddy, ma bouchal, and I'll be sentinel."

Ah! Argus, Argus. Mercury's lyre closed all thy hundred eyes and thou awoke too late, and only to find the Thessalian sword trembling above thy shuddering heart.

When the major went to Immenschikoff to

stroke him down, and give him a bit of hay, there was froth about his mouth, his eyes glared, and he kicked savagely at the padded sides of the horse-box.

"He's a good 'un to go, Paddy," said the major, "but Job's own wife hadn't half such a divil of a temper."

Five minutes later, the London train glided in with a boding scream; Punch gave a farewell "tootle, tootle," took off his dirty striped head-dress to the major, nodded to Bassevi, and while his companions struck up—

> "Campdown race-coorse, two mile long,
> With a Dood-da, Doo-da"

went off with the keeper and his man; the major and Bassevi took their seats for Cottenham, while Paddy vaulted into the safe side of the box that held Immenschikoff and the hopes of Fitzegbert Cantelupe.

CHAPTER IX.

THE ROUGH RECEPTION.

In the good old stories of mythology, the hero's danger generally implies the hero's deliverance. The inventor, who seems to have been too good-hearted or too fond of his creations to destroy them in the modern sensational way, generally provides a *Deus* strong enough to unloose the Gordian knot that the poet's art has woven. But, alas! in real life when Andromeda is bound naked to the rock the sharp biting cords of fate eat into her soft pliant limbs; slowly or swiftly upheaving out of the blind waste of surging waters, emerges the greedy and ruthless monster with glittering crimson teeth and fiery dilating eyes; and too often, alas! from no white cloud poised over the setting sun descends Perseus, glittering in magic mail, and upborne on the azure wings of a heaven-stabled Hippogriff.

Guilty or repentant, time brings to many a miserable, erring, wretched son of Adam, at the

destined hour, the drop that is to fall under his feet, the balanced axe that is to descend on his strained neck. Pitiless are Time and Fate, and we sow that we do reap. The deluge was fast rising to the Vicarage door; already, indeed, it was washing over the threshold. The avalanche trembled to its fall; the fire smouldered that was soon to sweep all before it. Faster and faster grew the ill weeds of debt; quick as the fairy beanstalk they spread and tangled, till Beauflower fairly lost his way in the dark forest of them. There was another Oxford tailor's bill, 30*l.*; the Chetwynd Dilapidation Fund, 120*l.* to replace; 25*l.* of Charity Funds drawn to pay the builder's weekly demand, to be restored; the insurance was coming on again; and there was Pitts's bill, and the bill of the Slobury grocer, together 19*l.* 10*s.* 2*d.* In fact, to secure money for indispensable current expenses,—to provide 50*l.* for a marriage tour, and to preserve his credit and honour, and happiness, the Vicar could not do with less than 300*l.*, and that would still leave arrears. What was to be done? Where to look for help? Heaven was dark and lowering; Earth shut her ears. Friends there were none available. How could he ask Goodrick, with his hard, cynical opinions on debt and improvidence? Besides, why lose friends by the old miserable way of

borrowing money? he remembered the hurt pride, and over exigent demands for gratitude usual with poor humanity in such cases. No! Beauflower was at that age when opinions sometimes crystallise in a moment into determinations. He would never ask friends for money whatever his necessities. Come prison, workhouse, starvation, better than that torture. No! he would apply only to money lenders, or comparative strangers, whom he could repay with interest at whatever sacrifice, at the next tithe day. There was but one other resource, and that was the sure, but disagreeable one, of applying to Mr. Harker. The plea to be used was obvious. The constant drain of money for the church before all the subscriptions could be got in. It was merely to ask the loan of 300*l.* till the next January, when his tithes came in, and that would give him two more payments before he need restore the money. He should offer interest, and that of course (graciously or ungraciously it really did not much matter) would be refused. One gulp and hurt pride would be got down.

His mother and sister had gone out to tea at the Chetwynds, and the Vicar had dined late on his return from Fontford, where the two Irish ruffians had been sent to Salisbury gaol for three months' hard labour and to be twice whipped. It was two hours after his six o'clock dinner that, sit-

ting by his fire, (for it was a wet night) Beauflower suddenly resolved on instant action. He seized his hat, umbrella, and gloves, screwed down his moderator lamp, locked up these detestable truth-telling account books that he had been consulting, put up Zoe, his favourite kitten, in the snuggest cushioned corner of his easy chair, and pressed its soft little head between its white front paws, till it purred in soothing gratitude.

As the Vicar descended into the hall, he opened the kitchen door, where Mary was singing like a sleepy thrush while George cleaned the knives in the outhouse, and the placid cook darned a stocking, and told her to get tea ready at nine. He was going to the Abbey on business, and he should not stop longer than that.

As he opened the hall door,. the petulant driving rain darted in his face in sharp flying lines, and a splash of wet came down on his patient umbrella from the vine and roses over the porch. The rain sounded loud upon the leaden roof of the porch, and pattered loud on the broad glazed leaves of the laurels and aucubas. He went back and got his great brown driving coat, then, equipped in stout armour,

"Broadcloth without, an honest heart within,"

sallied forth defiant of the elements, and master

of all skyey influences that a fickle English summer could summon. Pluck always meets its own reward; before he had well passed the great echoing arch, the rain beat slower, and gradually died away. Few sounds greeted the Vicar in that sombre walk except now and then the scream and flutter of some water bird on the lake; but his lode-star was the great shining house yonder, the temple of his goddess. It was for her he had trampled on his pride. The great pretentious ugly house was sacred to him now. It was the casket that held his treasure, he loved it for her sake, and having a deep and earnest belief in an all-ruling Deity, he prayed to God to bless her and also the house that sheltered her. Half that prayer was heard, the rest the night wind from the terraces swept away into the darkness, which as yet spread unredeemed by any star.

As Beauflower pulled the bell, the thought that he might catch some glimpse of Amy thrilled through his heart. The servants showed no great alacrity in coming to the door, which, after some minutes, was opened by Roberts the butler, who looked pale and bullied, (he had that morning had to produce his half-year's wine account, which had not been altogether so satisfactory as could have been wished) and he limped with a

slight attack of gout—a disease of the old school, which has a partiality for butlers. He looked rather hurt and distressed at the apparition of a visitor. Yes, Mr. Harker was at home, just gone into his study after dinner—not very well; not very usual to disturb him at that time, but he would certainly see. Would Mr. Beauflower walk into the drawing-room?

It was not the first time the Vicar had called after dinner on parish business, but latterly the two families had been on less friendly terms. Beauflower said he would not walk in, but preferred waiting at the door. While he stood there with Wasp scratching at the door-mat, he heard Ethel, on some upper landing, laughing and calling Amy; but no glimpse of "the beatific vision" was vouchsafed to him. Roberts returned in about five minutes with rather an alarmed manner, and said, in rather a deprecating way, if Mr. Beauflower would walk in Mr. Harker could give him a quarter of an hour, but at a quarter past eight he expected one of his bailiffs on particular business.

This did not augur a very pleasant or *apropos* visit; but the Vicar, with his foot once on the ladder, had determined to try and scale the wall. The excuse he had planned so shielded his pride, that he felt no distrust and no uneasiness. When

Roberts threw open the study door, Mr. Harker was standing with one foot on the iron lid of the tank which we have before described, and had one hand on the small key of the padlock that fastened it. He looked round rather angrily at his evidently unwelcome visitor, but did not invite him to take a chair, nor did he sit down himself.

Beauflower apologised for the intrusion at so unusual an hour, to which Mr. Harker made no reply, but began abruptly discussing the restoration of the church.

"I see your fellows are getting on," he said, "but I suppose, as usual, they'll run it up to twice the amount of the contract. They'll make you suggest alterations, and then double the estimate."

"I hope not and I think not," said the Vicar, rather drily, for he did not like Mr. Harker's sneering manner.

"You clergymen are not men of business, and they do what they like with you; by the bye, I have been thinking I ought not to let you go on with the supposition that I'm going to make up all the deficiencies; there is too much expected of us rich people. I shall not give a farthing more than the fifty pounds I first sent. You must not rely on me for any more. You must

remember I never approved of the restoration, never saw the necessity for it, and being a ritualist, I object *in toto* to the style in which it is being done."

The Vicar looked disappointed.

"I strongly condemn the way in which you country clergymen always do these things. You resolve to raise five or six hundred pounds. Then without the least clear notion of how the money is to be got—from the one squire or two or three dogged farmers—you begin the building, and saddle yourself with a heavy debt. Half of you embarrass yourselves for life in this absurd way, out of mere vanity and the desire to have a handsome church."

Beauflower's spirit rose. "In this case, Mr. Harker," he said, "though I may not altogether have counted the cost, there was no vanity in the case. The old tower was dangerous; the architect told me if that chief clamp once loosened, the tower might fall any time the bells rang. The mouldy seats, the uneven pavement, the green walls, were not becoming God's house. I will never submit to have a place of worship a ruin, while my own house is luxurious."

"I'm iron on these subjects; but if you get the money, of course it is no business of mine. I consented to the restoration, you can now do as you

like. By the bye, Mr. Beauflower," he said, "take a chair; I wanted to speak to you on a matter that more nearly concerns me. (Harker's face reddened with anger as he sat down, and clutched a torn newspaper which lay on the floor.) I want to ask you whether you are the author of that letter in the last Salisbury paper signed 'Draco.'"

"I did not write it."

"Pray did you suggest to the writer that paragraph in which, after alluding to the murder of Mr. Travers by poachers, the writer says, 'I do boldly say that the man who bred game in such wanton profusion, was as much guilty of the blood of the murdered man, as if he had shot him down with his own hand.' Now I ask you, sir, on your honour as a clergyman and a gentleman, did you or did you not suggest that paragraph?" As he said this, in a furious voice, Mr. Harker tore the paper into twenty pieces, and stamped on the fragments.

"Your voice and manner, Mr. Harker," said Beauflower, "are such, that I do not know that I am bound to answer questions so rudely enforced; but, as your minister and neighbour, I will forget these circumstances and answer you frankly. I did not write the letter; I did not suggest any part of it, and I do not know who did. I am, as you know, an enemy to the present

game laws, which I think are cruelly oppressive to the farmer, and utterly demoralising to the poor; but I do not publish these opinions, least of all anonymously."

"Oh no," said Harker, with a sardonic sneer; "you are too bold and blunt to wear a mask; you strike openly. I have to thank you, remember, for that admirable sermon yesterday, in which you mocked at my origin, and held me up to my tenants' contempt as a landlord who sent his tenants in their old age to pine to death in the workhouse. Sir, I thank you for the very admirable lesson of respect and obedience that you taught the poor. I now understand why my faithful servants are assassinated, and why my own life is in hourly danger."

The Vicar was thunderstruck. "I sketched," he said, "the men of all classes who neglect their duties, without any thought of you."

"Without thought of me, sir! Was not my father a steward? Answer me that."

"I did not remember that he was when I wrote my sermon."

"A likely story. You shoot a man from behind a wall, and then say you did not think he was passing by. You cannot think me an idiot. It was all aimed at me. My cottages, my severity against poachers, my cruelty, as you call it,

against lazy, bad, insolent, and dishonest tenants. Everyone, even my own wife and children, knew the target at which you aimed your poisonous darts."

"Mr. Harker, I am astonished that you do not know me better. No thought of you entered my mind. If I differ from your views about the poor, I should not use such a method of assailing them. I animadverted on the shortcomings of many classes, and even on those of my own profession."

"I have long seen your ways," stormed on the unappeasable man, whom no calm words could soften. "You brought that friend of yours here to hold me up to ridicule before my guests. I never forget an injury. Neglect of duties, indeed! And who are you? A man whom all the parish know to be plunged in a slough of debt. Perhaps even now you have come about some loan; but I do not lend to mere acquaintances—you have wasted your time."

"Sir," said Beauflower, his blood boiling, "I will not stay here to submit to such insults. You cannot be aware of what you are saying."

"I shall come no more to your church, nor shall any one of my servants. You shall preach to empty walls. I shall stop all my subscriptions. I'll not be preached at by anyone."

"In your present state of irritation, and as my own temper is fast going, I will wish you good night," said the Vicar, putting on his hat. "Whether I again set foot under your roof, will be a subject for after consideration. Good night, sir."

The Vicar walked out of the study, and closed the door after him. As he passed across the hall a page-boy, who had been waiting, and not improbably listening, ran up to him and said—

"If you please, Mr. Beauflower, Mrs. Harker would be glad to see you in the dining-room, for a moment, before you go."

As the pert little rascal preceded him through a turning leading from the hall, they met Amy, who in a white Garibaldi and blue silk skirts, looked more a fairy princess than ever. There was only time for one fond longing look, one loving grasp of the little hand, and they parted. Short as the interview was, the page-boy took in its details very fairly, for he presently reported in the servants' hall that—

"My eye, didn't he squeeze her hand? and didn't she give him a look, neither? It's all right in that quarter."

Miss Caroline Harker was playing a showy, difficult, artless piece of Moschelles, when the Vicar entered, but at a look of her worthy mother she instantly got up, shook hands coldly with the

visitor, and sailed out of the room in her smirking artful way. Mrs. Harker, rising from a buhl Davenport at which she was writing notes, flounced down gracefully and diplomatically with the frankest and most winning manner in her pattern-book, upon a round topaz-coloured damask settee, and invited Beauflower to a seat beside her.

"I am afraid, my dear Mr. Beauflower," she began (her first parallel—the old soldier), "that you and Mr. Harker have been having words. I was passing through the hall, and I could hardly help hearing you. You are both too impetuous. That unfortunate sermon seems to have very much hurt my husband's feelings. You clever young men are often so wanting in tact."

"I assured Mr. Harker that I had no thought of him. I did not even remember at the time I wrote the sermon, that his father had ever been a steward, nor do I indeed see anything to be ashamed of in a humble origin. All families sprung from the earth. My great-grandfather was a Dutch shipbuilder, and I like to think of it."

"My dear young man," said Mrs. Harker, smiling, till her golden ogress tooth glistened in the light of the solar lamp, "every one has his weakness. Some people, you see, like to forget these things. When you have lived longer and learned the value of tact, you will discover this. *Apropos*

de bottes, I wanted just a moment's private conversation with you, my dear Mr. Beauflower, about our pretty little governess, Miss Robinson."

The colour rose to the Vicar's cheeks. Was his love known, too? What could she be aiming at? He bowed assent and readiness to listen, and armed for the defensive, every rivet closed and his visor down, as far as it would go.

"It has come under my observation, as the natural guardian of Miss Robinson (we women, you know, can see these things even in the dark), and it has also been reported to me by various persons, whose names I need not mention, that you and Miss Robinson are in love with each other, and constantly meet in secret."

"We do not meet in secret. Your spies are liars," said Beauflower, furiously, and storming in on the only half-completed trenches of the artful enemy. "We meet openly. I do not disguise that I am in love with Miss Robinson. I have no reason to be ashamed of such an attachment."

"Far from it; far from it. Be patient. I only wish to help forward so fitting a match—however much I may regret the loss of Miss Robinson's services—and to silence the busy scandalous tongues that—"

"Mrs. Harker," said Beauflower, starting up

like Satan at the touch of Ithuriel's spear, though with far different impulses, "I will not sit here to listen to these words. No one but yourself and the fawning tale-bearers that surround you, and shape their reports to please you, would dare utter them. I make no secret of my love for Miss Robinson; my own family know it."

"And her family?" said Mrs. Harker, softly. It was a palpable hit, and shook the head of the enemy's column.

"They *will* know it to-morrow. The fainting state Amy was in when I rescued her from those Irish villains the other day, prevented my then speaking as I had intended."

"Then you really intend to marry, and it is not a mere flirtation; for you young bachelor clergymen are such terrible wicked flirts, as Carry says."

"It *is* no flirtation."

"Is the day fixed?"

"That day, Mrs. Harker, you will know in due time."

"Now you are not angry?" said the delighted manœuverer, who still saw hopes of landing the coronetted fish that hitherto had evaded her net, and carried off her strongest hooks.

Beauflower made no reply, but took Mrs. Harker's proffered hand coldly, and bowed himself out.

It was then that Beauflower felt the deep abyss of degradation into which the imprudence of two reckless years had sunk him. Then the torture of the self-built purgatory began in very deed, with its icy darkness and mental agony. To be talked of and sneered at by his own parishioners; pitied by some, derided by others. To be offered money by one of his own tithe-payers; to be despised by people like Pitts; to be netted round and dogged by money-lenders; to be driven to seek aid of an ignoble man like Harker; last of all, to have to lay open his shame and misery to his own mother and sister; and, oh, worst—worst of all, to Amy, who hitherto had regarded him as so pure and perfect. "I will never," he said to himself, "set foot in that house again;—never."

"No hope from that den of vulgarity, pride, and trickery," he thought to himself, as he closed the hall door behind him, stepped out into the clear summer moonlight, and whistled Wasp, who darted before him, after a moor-hen he had put up at the edge of the lake. "There is only one hope now. That grinding task-master of Amy's father, Bassevi. He will exact to the utmost, but he is sure. I can sell my Cuyps, and the carving, and some plate, or worst come to the worst, dispose of my mother's policy, and re-insure her life when my means improve."

Beauflower was about half-way towards the lodge, when he heard two of the keepers approaching. They were talking in a loud voice, and laughing about some recent stroke of professional business.

"That's the style," said one. "The governor wants 'em all killed; why he's sharper after it than Travers was."

"That first cut did it. That's quicker than strychnine," said the other.

"Yes; he didn't want another."

As they passed the Vicar the first man said "Good night," in the artful gamekeeper's way, to see who it was.

"Good night," replied the Vicar, frankly.

The moment they had passed, one of the men broke out into a coarse vulgar laugh.

The arch sent up its hollow tomb-like echo, that had so often warned Travers, and thoughts of the dead man, of his tyranny and rapacity, flashed through the Vicar's mind.

"De mortuis nil nisi bonum," says the generous Latin proverb; but does not this mean, "De mortuis *nil*," in many cases; or as biographers say, "De mortuis nulla veritas." The Vicar rounded the corner; the Vicarage was dark: his mother and sister were not back. Just as he slammed the garden door behind himself and Wasp, something dark came crawling feebly and slowly

towards him, moaning piteously, like a dying child. Wasp began to bark and whimper, not being since his accident a dog of much courage.

At this moment the moon slipped out from behind a cloud, its light showed the Vicar poor little Zoe, his favourite kitten, the archest, brightest, gayest little form that feline life could assume, cruelly paralysed by a blow of a keeper's ash stick across the loins. It dragged its hind legs behind it—they were dead. That one blow had changed the merry little creature from youth to age, from health to pain and misery.

"A curse!" cried the Vicar, as he gently lifted the wounded creature, who had but a few agonising hours to live, "a curse on the hand that did this, and on the head that willed it. Would to God a whirlwind could come and sweep to the sea these detestable pampered birds that are fed with English blood; that bring death, want, temptation, and devastation to all animated things wherever they come."

There is a churchyard and a prison behind every pheasants' cover.

CHAPTER X.

IMMENSCHIKOFF.

Bibury races were held not exactly at Bibury, but at an old Roman camp on the Downs, about a mile and a half from the town. Taking place about a week after the Newmarket July stakes, and nearly two months later than Salisbury races, they interfered with no other sporting engagement, and were usually well patronised in the county.

"The names of fortified Roman, British, or Danish camps," as my learned friend, the Rev. Isaac Taylor, says, "are very commonly marked by the suffix *bury*." Like that fine camp, Yarnbury, not far from Stonehenge, was Danebury, large enough to hold a legion, and boasting two banks and two ditches, the inner one fifty feet deep. Danebury resembles Yarnbury also in this, that in October there is a fair held at both places for the sale of sheep and colts. It was a pretty, wild, thoroughly Wiltshire spot, and a better

place for a two mile course could not have been selected, for the thin hide of turf covering the chalk became soon dry after rain, and was springy enough after any weather except a long drought. The camp itself, like a great cup, held many hundred spectators on its turfen rim, and for Grand Stands the barouches and the roofs of the drags sufficed.

It was "a mighty pretty sight" that July morning, when the broad blue sky hung like a great azure ocean overhead, and the little world of busy pigmies beneath looked like so many moving little toiling creatures at the bottom of the sea. A soft ruffling breeze blew over the golden furze bushes of the Down, trifling with the pretty parti-coloured ribbons of the ladies in the barouches and those of the strong-armed, rosy, bouncing farmers' daughters in the light carts anchored up and down the bounding lines of the course, and it blew in and out like sails the dirty canvas walls, put up to prevent more homicide than necessary where the hairy cocoa nuts were poised on the tall slender sticks that rose from the receptive baskets of sand in the "Knock me Down" and "Aunt Sally" districts.

By eleven o'clock, the hour of the first race for "the Farmer's Plate," which was won by Mr. Bennett's "Apple-Pie," and was a very hollow affair, all the roads, ox-drives, and old Roman

paths, leading to Danebury, north, south, east, and west, were alive with carts, carriages, horsemen, and sturdily trudging pedestrians. Far away across the rolling Down you could pick out the spot destined for the races by the white booths that had sprung up quick as mushrooms after a warm rain. Cantelupe's two drags, from the old camp were welcomed a quarter of a mile by vendors of new guineas, (two a penny), and by vendors holding up fans of little wax dolls.

"Large families of babbies for one shilling, three on 'em for sixpence—who'll have a babby for tuppence?" There was also the successor of the celebrated "Jerry," the usual low comedian, with a gilt cocked hat, red coat, enormous tin eye-glass, and those admirable truisms that never grow stale.

"Flint stones are hard for the feet, ladies; it's a hard thing, ladies, to be hungry, and have nothing to eat."

There was "Donkey Jimmy," too, in his huge yellow wig and long false nose, braying to "please the haristocracy, not the common people," at sixpence a bray, and selling red cards.

"'Krek carts of the races; here's a full list of the terrible, *terrible* high-bred cattle, together with all the names, weights, and colours of—the—riders."

Next came a bawling fellow, already rather

drunk, with recruit ribbons in his hat, who approached the carriage, tried to get run over, and evidently suffering from Bell's Life on the brain, shouted out—

"Here are no ifs, or shoulds, or doubts. The *Mouse* boldly says, 'Immenschikoff, first; Match-Box, second; Rattletrap, third,'—all the rest nowhere. What did Mouse do for the Spring Epsom? Didn't he name Mincemeat, and who won? Hoorah! three cheers then for the owner of the winner! Three cheers for Muster Cantelupe!"

"Three cheers for Immenschikoff!" said that terrible wild young Brown, as he darted by Cantelupe's drag, driving his father and a pretty blue-eyed plump cousin the old people were trying to coax him to marry.

Cantelupe waved his hat, he was in brilliant spirits; chaffed everyone he met, and flung a sovereign to Donkey Jimmy for a card. He had already furnished Talbot, Filby, and all his other toadies and sponges, with wooden vertebrated dolls. He had thrown half-a-crown to a fat acrobat, who had picked up a needle with his eye-lid, and spit fire, at the Slobury gate; a shilling to a fellow who stood on his head, and sang "The Old Arm Cheer;" and a half-sovereign to a bony acrobat and a pretty black-eyed boy in dirty fleshings and a tinsel band round his forehead,

who had done "La Perche" at the turning to Chicklade.

"Never be afraid of humbugs," Paley once said when somebody expressed his surprise at seeing the shrewd old divine, who thought ready money such a useful check to the imagination, a spectator at a whist party. The Vicar was a man whose mind demanded honest amusement, and though disapproving of the sordid modern gambling spirit that has spoiled racing, and no great admirer of the blustering "Licensed Victualler" interest that has elbowed out nearly all the true gentlemen, he still felt a true young Englishman's delight in a well-bred horse, and in the keen struggle of half-a-dozen lightning-winged racers. Trying to act according to his own high standard, he seldom went to races, merely, as he avoided hunting or cricket, as a matter of time, his parish leaving him but little, and his reading and society demanding all that. Yes, man in full vigour of health, bodily and mentally, craves for violent exercise; and when a man has no time to be a Red Indian, it does him good to see a race, a wrestle, or a cricket match.

The race course was roped round in a rough and ready way. There was just a bell on the top of a strong post to clear the course, and give the signal for saddling, and a raised box for the

judges. The drags and barouches were drawn up in a line near the booths; the greater number of them towards the winning-post end. Cantelupe having won 200*l.* on the Farmer's Plate, was now in as high spirits as if he had retrieved all his losses on that treacherous green turf, and the still more treacherous green cloth. There he stood for all the world like Mr. Frith's less gentlemanlike swell, his light grey dust coat fluttering in the wind as he caroused on the roof of the blue drag, waving a champagne bottle, as a token of restored friendship, to the starters, or rather, it must honestly be confessed, to Amy Robinson, who, looking still somewhat pale, was standing up in the Harker barouche holding laughing Ethel of the golden main before her, and enjoying the scene with all the fresh, frank, unrestrained delight of an intelligent open-hearted girl, to whom everything was new. Mrs. Harker was busy, dispensing her graduated smiles to the best diplomatic advantage; while Miss Caroline Harker was using her opera glass with the most exquisite grace, and asking absurd questions with the most unconscious naïveté. Beauflower dared not trust himself near the Harkers' carriage, so bowed from a distance as he drove over the course with Julia, eyeing Amy (who saw him, and knew his heart) with that sort of

longing despair with which the souls in Dante's Purgatory (we can hardly fancy a Purgatory before Dante) watch afar off the opening of the golden gates of Paradise, sometimes catch a glimpse of the white robes of the elect. Nor did the Vicar dare stop for more than a moment near Cantelupe's noisy party, to see a spendthrift run laughing down the primrose path. Once, and once only, Cantelupe passed, on his way to see his jockey don his black and yellow and go into the scale. He stopped and shook hands with Beauflower and his sister, being singularly gallant to the latter, who was, however, for her, unusually silent and reserved.

Beauflower who, even when miserable to the outer world, seemed always in high spirits, was cruel enough to banter Julia on her unusual muteness. The young prodigal, it must be confessed, looked very handsome on that eventful day; his face tanned of that ruddy brown that becomes an athletic young English gentleman, who does not care to bleach himself blind over other people's ideas. His broad chest and elastic limbs looked all the more stalwart for the gauzy coat, and the blue veil, twisted with a certain indescribable *chic* round his hat. The brains might be rather fallow, but the heart was in the right place, and there was a superabundance of life, hope, and energy. Nor did Cantelupe, with all a young

man's instinct for grace and beauty, fail to observe that Julia's rather defiant face looked singularly handsome now when lighted up by excitement and vivified by the ardour of observation. Amy, who seemed rather chilled and depressed,—she might, her lover thought, have had some faint inkling of his recent visit,—appeared as tender and graceful as ever, but perhaps rather below her usual standard of loveliness.

"What do you really think, Ned, of Mr. Cantelupe's horse? I do so hope he'll win."

"Those fellows who are preying on him tell him the horse has ten pounds in hand, that is Ju, that he could carry ten pounds more than he will be obliged to carry; but then they'll say anything; Immenschikoff is a showy, overgrown sort of horse, not half so much to my taste as Lord Mazagan's black brown Spitfire (cherry and white). They tell me that the young idiot has actually got 92,000*l.* depending on this race, and is ready to take 4000*l.* to 2000*l.* about the animal now, but that is all gibberish to you, I forgot."

"I suppose there is no great art in riding a race, dear, if it's all fair, and among gentlemen; you just ride as hard as you can pelt, and try and get in first."

"That's all you know about it then, you little ignoramus; why there's all the art in the world—

(No, I've got no money for you, my good woman. I don't want my fortune told, and I know I shall win money on the dark horse)—all the art, Ju; you want power, seat, and science. You may cut down the field from end to end, that is what, I believe, Immenschikoff is to do; or you may get in front, and stop the pace; you may let yourself be headed and come again; or if your horse mustn't be hurried, you may lie away from your horses, and creep up, inch by inch, before the pace is too great; or you may wait till you get the pull, and catch the apparent winner, with a Chifney rush on the post; then you may nurse a sinking horse in, or screw him in, or dodgily lift him in by a nose. Oh! there's all the art in the world, Ju."

"Well, Ned, I never thought there was so much in it. How I do wish we could get near Amy!"

The betting was going on very hotly among the farmers and tradesmen of Slobury, as the black and yellow jacket darted by for a trial canter, just feeling the turf.

"Eh, but he's in grand fettle," said one of Harker's Yorkshire grooms, the one who fought Paddy, as Immenschikoff lilted by with grand free action, dilated nostril, and full proud eye. "I doubt, man, whether I shall pull off my three crowns with Spitfire."

The Down rang with cries of 20 to 1 on the Field; 33 to 1 on Champagne, (Colonel Harcourt, mauve); 7 to 2 on Baronet; 8 to 1 on Spitfire, (Lord Mazagan, cherry and white); 40 to 1 on Daring Dick (Major Filby, chocolate and green); Zingari (Sir Edmund Antrobus, white and blue). In gleams of pretty kaleidoscopic colour the seven horses that were going to run for the Cantelupe Plate cantered past; boys, dogs, and men, scattering before them.

The general admiration went for Immenschikoff, to whom recent victory at York had given prestige, but the select few were all unanimous for Harlequin, (Mr. Harker, green and orange), a small compact and blood-like whole coloured bay.

"A horse with more stay in him than Cantelupe's, but not so smart for a short burst," was Lord Mazagan's verdict.

As Jimmy Jackson, the smart cool old man boy (a changeling if ever there was one), swept by the ropes where Beauflower's steady-going pony carriage was moored, his thin black and yellow silk puffing out with the wind, the Vicar eyed the horse and the rider with great earnestness.

"How much would you think, Ju," he said, turning round to his sister, "that little fellow in the black and yellow gets for this day's work?"

"I don't know, Ned, but I should think about 10*l.*"

"One hundred pounds; as much, dear, as many curates earn for three hundred and sixty-five days' bodily and mental toil."

"What a shame! but oh, do look here, he is back again; what an enormous stride, it seems flying to the other's galloping. Oh! he must win."

"He is certainly very fast, but his eyes are rather wild. I think he is too powerful for that little man in the black and yellow."

"Lord bless yer, not one of them can touch him," said Paddy to the major, as the jockeys, led by Jimmy Jackson, rode in irregular procession to the starting place.

"Bedad, you can't lose, my darlint, even if the bridle breaks," said the major to the immoveable jockey.

"He went very oddly in his gallop yesterday, Mr. Cantelupe," said the trainer; "but I suppose the railway fretted him."

"Very likely," said Bassevi, who never left Cantelupe's side, and had just laid 300*l.* on the field.

"He's the best horse, Mr. Bassevi, at all distances when he's not put out," said the Codford trainer; "at all distances, sir, from half a mile to four miles, that I ever trained. He's an honour

to Wiltshire. I'd back him against a field of sixty. I believe there are men at Tattersalls' who, before night, would give three thousand guineas for that ere hoss."

Lord Mazagan, (cautious old bird), plucked long ago, but with feathers regrown, had only 200*l.* depending on the event, but he was taking good care to secure that if possible.

"Immenschikoff seems in his tantrums to-day," he said to the jockey, who stooped to listen to his last instructions; "your only chance is to get Spitfire well off and try to cut the whole lot down; fight it out till the last stride; but if that long-legged brute once gets three lengths a-head, slacken the running, and screw in for second. If it was only a wet day I believe the brute would not be even placed."

The coloured silks drew in a line, but Immenschikoff was difficult to start. He neighed, he reared, he even kicked.

Two men dressed like countrymen pushed up close and got next Bassevi, who stood under the Cantelupe drag in a waggon, and next Farmer Brown's cart. One of the men nudged Bassevi and said—"It's all up with—Men." Immenschikoff made three false starts, and at last got off badly. Spitfire was first, Baronet second, and the rest pretty well together. Then Spitfire came away

several lengths a-head, keeping a bold front. Champagne was stubborn, and Zingari ran ungenerously, but short lived success. This was only for a moment. Presently Immenschikoff put himself together, got his stride, and tore away like a great brown billow. One by one he collared them, cherry and white, mauve and chocolate and green, white and blue. Then it was neck to neck with the green and orange alone for the last mile with a slight ascent. The brave bay did all he knew, and fought bravely for every inch of ground, but nothing could resist the fury of the chestnut, who went raking along as if winged by the rolling shout that ran along the course from the excited country people. The Cantelupe drag was in a ferment of waving hats, the major and Paddy were black in the face with bawling "Black and yellow," and "2 to 1 on black and yellow."

The struggle was entirely between those two, one sounding whack of the whalebone in less skilled hands than those of young "Bob Bland," Mr. Harker's jockey, had many a time shot a horse into the winning post. The cries grew maddening as Immenschikoff and Harlequin now expended their utmost strength and seemed flying through the air. But Immenschikoff's savage fury and long limbs soon told. In vain Bob Bland

tried to creep up, to make his challenge, and then try a Chifney dash at the winning post. Harlequin was six lengths at least behind. Jimmy Jackson was working forward with his irresistible "pull and hustle;" another instant his whip hand up would launch the winner past the post, now only thirty yards off, when suddenly Immenschikoff stopped in his stride as if a Sneider bullet had gone through his brain, crossed his legs staggeringly, stumbled four or five yards, and dropped—DEAD. Jimmy Jackson, with the quickness of lightning, rolled off, nimble as an acrobat; ran, looked at its eyes, and felt its heart; but there was no light, no pulsation.

In another instant Harlequin flew by the winning post, up went the number 4, Mr. Harker's Harlequin (green and orange), and there was a roar of delight from the crowd that surged over the course, turning the green black by the irresistible inundation, some eager to discover their debtors, but the most part driven by irresistible curiosity to see the horse that had died so suddenly, and in such an extraordinary manner. The general opinion was that Immenschikoff had ruptured some leading blood-vessel in the chest, but already a report had got about and it was spreading like wild fire, that there had been foul play somewhere. Mr. Harker and Bassevi, how-

ever, did not agree with the latter opinion, and two countrymen in the crowd said they had had to do with horses all their lives, and had often known over-worked horses drop suddenly dead. Lord Mazagan shook his head, and declared that the animal should be examined by a veterinary surgeon, for there was a froth about the lips which seemed to him suspicious.

Cantelupe and Beauflower, with all the plunger's delighted but outwardly sympathetic friends, were still standing round the horse, when a roar of indignation arose near the winning post, where the men with betting books had assembled to decide their profits and losses; the next moment there was a screaming shout of "a welsher, a welsher," and there came flying towards them a frightened dishevelled wretch, bruised, muddy, and bleeding, one shoe off, his hat lost, his coat half torn away, his waistcoat in strips flying behind him. It was poor Paddy, who, in the ardour of enthusiasm and the confidence of success, had adventured on bets to the amount of 20*l.* more than he possessed in the world. The major, half resisting the onslaught, half borne away by it, was trying hard to save the unhappy fellow, who was delirious with affright at his own danger, and with horror at the fate of Immenschikoff, from immediate violence, and

trying to collar him and hand him over to more deliberate justice. By a tremendous effort the major at last got the poor frightened wretch behind him, and under covert of the group of gentlemen, and then swaying a huge club of an oak stick he swept round the weapon that was as terrible as the sail of a windmill.

"Back," he cried, to a frantic groom (one of Harker's), "back, you howling spalpeen, or I'll teach you how to pronounce 'murder' in Irish. Mr. Beauflower, help me to keep back these barking dogs. Gentlemen, the man may be a welsher, but you won't see him torn to pieces before your very eyes, will you?"

Beauflower and the others instantly, with the chivalrous instinct of true gentlemen, whether in chain mail or broad cloth, placed the man in a sort of hollow square and fronted their adversaries, who drew slightly back, but kept roaring "a welsher," "a welsher," "stone him," "pump him," "knock his head off," "kill him."

"What is all this about, major?" said Cantelupe, whom champagne had flushed and rendered careless as to his losses.

"This fellow," said the major, "has been betting ten times as much as he's got. Come, Paddy, hand over that 5*l.*, and I'll make it go as far as I can with these blackgyards. But that's

not the worst, he's been drugging that horse, or letting the touts do it, and by——if it was my own father, I'd pull him up. We all think it was done when we were waiting at Warminster."

"Where's a policeman?" said Bassevi, more indignant than anyone else.

"That's a dangerous fellow," said Mr. Harker, just then working his way through the crowd, "and I have always believed that he had some hand in the murder of my poor keeper, Travers."

"Now, Pat, you come along," said P. C. Vincent, stony as ever, "nobody shan't touch you while I've got the charge of you. Hold up, man, I'm not going to carry you."

Poor Paddy ("dant veniam corvis, vexant censura the gulls") tried in vain to dash himself at the feet of Cantelupe, and to assert his fidelity and his innocence. But off the stern Rhadamanthus in blue and pewter buttons dragged him to the cart that was to whirl him into Slobury lock-up.

Presently, when Beauflower had left the Cantelupe party round the dead horse, up came Mr. Pitts with another tale of race-course misery.

"You'll be sorry to hear, sir," he said, "that that young Brown has lost a quantity of money his father gave him to buy sheep with to-morrow at Warminster. He got playing roulette at one of the booths, they stripped him of every farthing,

and now he has driven off quite drunk to Warminster with some tipsy fellows in a cart. He swears he'll enlist; old Mr. Brown's nearly mad about it, and has just driven off after him. Is it true, sir, that young Mr. Cantelupe has lost 27,000*l.*?"

"I fear he has lost a good deal by this unfortunate affair, Mr. Pitts, but I hope not quite so much. I'm very sorry to hear about this foolish young fellow. It would, perhaps, be better if he did enlist."

Mr. Beauflower had just seen that the Harkers were less surrounded by carriages than they had been, and was making his way up as near them as possible, greeted by rays of welcome from the beacon lights of Amy's dear eyes, when from a booth close by emerged Cantelupe, his hat bruised, his eyes staring, his face heated with wine and anger. He had been fighting with a man who had cheated him in changing a note, there was blood upon his forehead, and his scarf was torn loose. Jack Talbot and Lord Mazagan were in vain trying to hold him back.

He came up shaking his fist at Mr. Harker, who sat lurid, gloomy, and astonished.

"You," he said, "you have had a hand in this. You're trying all you can to ruin me. You've set some rascal to poison this horse."

"You've been taking too much champagne, Cantelupe," said Harker, coldly; "go and sleep it off. I must remind you that your words are actionable."

Cantelupe would have made a rush to scale the barouche, had not his friends surrounded, and coaxed, and dragged him back. There was then a loud conversation, enforced by hands on his shoulders, and urgent entreaties, especially from Beauflower, who tried to persuade him how foolish and dangerous his conduct was, and how groundless his suspicions, it being now the universally established theory on the course that Paddy, to win his 20*l.*, had given the horse some slow poison unknown to anyone but himself.

Gradually they quieted and soothed him, and he put his dress to rights, smiled, and even seemed, by a violent mental effort, to shake off his intoxication. He shook off his advisers, however, somewhat angrily, all but Beauflower, who took his arm, and persuaded him to offer Harker his hand.

Julia and Amy were delighted at this, even Mrs. and Miss Harker smiled approval.

"I know I've lost everything," said Cantelupe, with rather a thick voice, "but still I won't be treated like a child by the fellows who've flayed me."

"Nonsense, old man," cried Jack Talbot, "been all fair."

Harker leaned over the side of the barouche, and in a bland and conciliating way held out his pale, pasty hand, but there was an ironical smile in his eyes, which even he could not suppress, and Cantelupe saw and felt it.

"No," he said, flinging down the proffered hand he had just coldly touched, "no, I will not take it. Let him do his worst. I'd rather sell every stick at Swallowcliff than cringe to a low cad like that."

"Take care, young man," said Mr. Harker, the tiger breaking out for a moment. "You'll repent this. I never forgive when I've once made up my mind."

His friends forced Cantelupe, still struggling, back to the booth.

"I say, Fitz," said Talbot, as they drove home, to Cantelupe, now more sober, "Filby and the rest have settled to go back to town to-night. You seem rather cut up with dropping this money. They think they're in the way."

"Then Jack, old man, we'll have a long night at billiards."

"Yaas—but—but—I'm going too. Filby has asked me to run across to Baden with him on Monday, and I'm going."

CHAPTER XI.

BREAKING THE ICE.

Mr. Pitts' story was quite true. Not only had the last slice gone of Cantelupe's fortune (30,000*l.*), it was now reported, but there had been also humbler sufferers on the field of the cloth of green. People pity the general, but few care for the poor drummer who lies in the ditch with both legs broken. Young Brown had, in an evil moment, spent 30*l.* of his father's hard-earned money, given him to hand over to a man who had sold Brown some ewes and wethers; he had then driven to Warminster and enlisted. Old Brown, half distracted at the conduct of his favourite son, had found him very tipsy in a public-house, drinking with a recruiting-sergeant, the fatal bunch of ribbons already dangling from his hat. He had refused to be bought out, declaring he was disgraced for ever, that he was suspected of murder, and constantly being spied after by the keepers, and that he never wanted to

see Summerleas again. Eventually his father returned, almost broken-hearted, without him.

It was the Wednesday after the race and the Vicar had just returned from trying to console the poor father and mother and the poor crippled brother, who seemed to pine amid the general desolation and distress. There were two evidently dunning letters awaiting Beauflower on his return; but it being Amy's half-holiday, it was no time to think of such things, so he thrust them into his breast-pocket, and sallied forth to Fontford, the field way, as light hearted as if there was not a man in the world who had a right to rail at him for money. Amy was to be at home by half-past two, and he was to meet her there, and demand her hand from her father and mother. Love is so sanguine, and the lover had no doubt of success. He felt sure (unless the old people had any very ambitious views for Amy) that he could remove all their objections. The pompous bell at the Abbey was just clanging for lunch when the Vicar set out.

An irrisistible magnetism led him as he passed to turn down for a moment to the old ruin where he had first breathed forth the love that was now part of his very life's blood. As he turned the corner of the yew bushes towards the porch a great black dog came up to him with laughing

eyes, mute interrogations, and recognition. It was Leo. Yes, there on a fallen tree, sat Mr. Goodrick, absorbed in meditation. He rose as the Vicar advanced, and held out his hand.

"You young men look forward," he said; "we old men look back. The best part of our life is behind us, but is before you lucky sons of the Immortal. I have been thinking of poor Staunton here, his young wife and his dreams, and my own, too; for you know I also lost my wife not long after my marriage, and the world has been ever since only a sort of large burial-place in my eyes."

The Vicar related the object of his walk.

The old man was delighted. "Nothing," he said, "will give me greater pleasure than to hear those three old cracked bells rivet your golden fetters, you luckiest of men. I love that girl, not merely for her tender, loving, gentle ways, but also because she is like some one I once loved. May Eros and Aphrodite lend honey to your words. But these two good old souls will not be difficult to soften. The old man is selfish, but only in a careless, happy-go-lucky way, and the wife is frugal and careful, but not to excess. They can't believe in Cantelupe now, poor lad: his losses have reduced him to a very low level, but he shan't be quite ruined even now, if I and

Fairfield can help it; for he is one of the three families for whom Staunton had a regard.

The Vicar expressed his fears that the prospect of an alliance with Cantelupe might have already led them to some rash promise.

"Not it—ugh! If Amy doesn't love him, what would he care for promises? He's too generous and high-spirited for that. He knows very well that fathers can't give away a daughter's heart, as if it was a broccoli, that has no voice in the matter, and is therefore not consulted by the gardener. By the bye, you really go to London on Friday?"

"Yes."

"Then to-morrow morning I or Tony will bring over the two jewel-cases. They are too valuable to send by night, especially since that undiscovered murder."

"I see a Spanish sailor tramp has been taken up at Cardiff on suspicion."

"That makes about the seventh. I hear the Warminster magistrates have discharged that poor vagabond; Tony tells me he met him and that he seemed almost broken-hearted at being suspected of being unfaithful by Cantelupe. He's been drinking about ever since, and I'm afraid is what Londoners call 'going to the bad.'"

"Poor fellow!" said the Vicar. "I really believe poor Paddy was only a victim. His wits are not quite full measure. He has always shown such an extraordinary fidelity to Cantelupe, who befriended him so when he was taken up for poaching on the Terraces in Travers's time. You heard of what those cruel fellows did to my little kitten, Zoe, that I had to kill?"

"Yes, I heard," said Goodrick, with bitter intensity. "I would as soon have a murderer for my valet as employ such men as that. But those game-laws harden and debase all who have to enforce them. Ugh! I wish I had the place; I'd clear it as Rufus cleared the New Forest. I hate the very sight of a pheasant. Good-bye; I shall stop here and muse a bit longer, and then I shall go and fulfil my promise (rather against the grain) and go and name a day for Harker to come and see my Rembrandt etchings. I've got a Hundred Guilder that will humble the fellow, who thinks that with his money he can buy anything. It is the finest existing. I have him there. Good-bye, Romeo: the brightest love-star lead thee safe."

"Good-bye," said the Vicar, and swept off at a smart pace.

Amy had not yet arrived when Beauflower reached the Lawsons', and he was afraid to start in

search of her for fear he might take the wrong road, as it had not been settled whether she came by the Terraces or the high road. Mr. Robinson was busy in his studio, at whose door the nasturtiums grew in great blooms of different depths of pale and dark brown orange, and in their odd-shaped and leaky cups black ruffians of humble bees were rummaging with all the quiet courtesy of unfeed custom-house officers. Below, too, spread a little azure growth of nemophyla, and some unobtrusive mignonette, which diffused a heavenly perfume whenever the breeze passed lingeringly over it. Mr. Robinson sat absorbed before a great canvas, on which was the first sketch of a Cupid and Psyche, whom three Cupids were binding together with strings of roses and myrtle; the design by some pupil of Titian. It was a pretty thing, and full of delicious colour. Mr. Robinson, who seemed depressed, grew quite eloquent about it.

"Sir Joshewa," he said, as he squeezed some cobalt lovingly under his palette-knife, "always made this great mistake in his desire for rich impasto and solidity; he used buttery mediums to paint with, and covered over perishable slow-drying colours with thin quick-drying glazes. The result was destruction."

Mrs. Robinson sat by the door (not that lead-

ing into the inner workshop, but the one leading into the garden) and worked at some old-fashioned silk netting (really a present for her husband on his forthcoming birthday).

"Amy will never forget you, I'm sure," she said to the Vicar, who was amiably standing up, holding a skein of blue silk for her to wind. "Twice you have saved her life: once in that terrible brook, and now from those dreadful wretches. We shall soon go from here, but we shall always remember your heroic courage."

"My dear Mrs. Robinson, what I did every man would have done. You have overwhelmed me with thanks, and so has Amy. Let us turn to something else. Don't talk nonsense about going. You ain't going—perhaps you'll never go."

"You have not heard of our bad news (a tear gathered in her eye as she spoke and glanced at her husband, who was intent on a scumble over the back of one of the rosy Cupids). "May I tell him, John? Yes, I see I may. Oh, Mr. Beauflower, do, do pray give us your advice, for indeed we need it."

"I shall be only too happy," said Beauflower; "come now, tell me all your troubles; you know by profession I am a father confessor."

"Yesterday morning we had a letter from that

cruel Mr. Bassevi, telling us that Mr. Cantelupe is entirely ruined, and that all the pictures he ordered must be instantly stopped; and this morning, that young coxcomb of a servant of his, who has been courting our little servant, Susan, and trying to persuade her that she ought to get a better place, came with a letter stopping all Mr. Harker's pictures too, except those already begun."

"It is very hard," said Mr. Robinson, looking up over his spectacles; "just as I thought I was achieving some remarkable effects of colour. The time I have spent here has been the happiest in my life. I have felt like a man who has put into harbour after a storm—and now comes this blow."

"I should insist on carrying out the contract, Mr. Robinson," said Beauflower. "I think I know an honest lawyer who would protect your interests in this matter. This man is a cheat. Has he paid you much in advance?"

"Well," said Mr. Robinson, transferring his brushes from his right to his left hand, and passing his hand through his thin grey hair in a perturbed way; "yes, he has at various times advanced certain sums, of which, trusting to his honour, I am afraid I have not kept a very exact account. He has pressed furniture, and wine, and other

things upon me, which he now pretends leave me considerably in his debt. I always was a child in money matters, and I fear I always shall be. Oh dear, dear, I only wish I had my time over again."

"Then the tenants the major got us so kindly," said Mrs. Robinson, "talk very large and promise very large, but they have only paid one quarter's rent. The major says it's all right, and no doubt it is; but we want the money, especially now."

"They allow him the agency for the champagne he sells for them," said Mr. Robinson, "and that pays his lodgings here, and his whisky—a *considerable item* (Mr. Robinson said this with an air of melancholy experience); but then he is so sanguine. He is full now of a patent he is going to take out for extracting a waterproof varnish for coats from horse-chestnut buds. The only difficulty remaining, he says, is obtaining a sufficient quantity, so he is getting a chemist to analyse the substance, to make it artificially. I don't know about it, but he is very sanguine."

The Vicar laughed. "Mr. Goodrick laid a cruel trap for the major the other day, Mrs. Robinson," he said. "He was boasting, in his amusing way, of having seen all the highest mountains in the world, including Chimborazo and the Himalayas; Goodrick quietly asked him if he had ever been up Dörfel, which sounded like a Norwegian

mountain. 'Dörfel,' said he; 'bedad, and I have, and slept on the top, and a finer view than there was from it I never clapped eyes on.' But, unfortunately for the major, Dörfel happens to be one of the chief mountains in the moon, and twenty-six thousand feet high."

Miserable as they were, Mr. and Mrs. Robinson laughed heartily at this.

"Still really he is a very extraordinary man," said Mrs. Robinson, "and he has gone through extraordinary adventures."

"I would not for the world underrate him," said the Vicar, "but I must say his imagination is certainly very active."

"All these misfortunes coming together, my dear sir," said Robinson, "you see make us both very anxious that dear Amy should keep her situation, and bear patiently with the little mortifications and indignities that those proud people put upon her, and which she sometimes is inclined, I much fear even to resent."

"Oh, it's shameful, Mr. Beauflower," said Mrs. Robinson. "Lately they hardly ever have her down to dinner when anyone is there. They seem frightened to death that people should admire her more than that stuck-up disagreeable daughter of theirs."

"They have so insulted me that I shall never

cross their threshold again," said the Vicar, with warmth. "I am very sorry that Amy—I mean Miss Robinson—has been obliged to bear these humiliations so long."

"It grieves me to the heart," said Mrs. Robinson, "to think that we shall now have to look to our dear girl for aid. But stop—I really think I hear her coming."

There was the click of a latch, and a light footfall along the paved passage from the street. Then the prettiest voice in the world was heard carolling,

"The mocking-bird sits singing on the tree."

Beauflower stepped behind the half-open door as Amy stooped to kiss her mother and ran in to kiss her father. Then she looked round, still not seeing the Vicar, and said, in rather a disappointed way, "What, isn't he come?"

"Who, Amy?" said her father, smiling.

Just at that moment she saw Beauflower, as he stood in the shadow, and by an uncontrollable emotion of love and delight, flew into his arms.

"Then you have told them all, dear Ned?" she said, kissing him.

The brush dropped from Robinson's hand, the netting fell on Mrs. Robinson's lap.

"Oh, it's come to that, has it?" said Mr.

Robinson. "Mr. Beauflower, Mr. Beauflower, why, you never told us that Amy loved you."

"Amy," said Mrs. Robinson; Amy fell at her mother's feet, and her mother pressed her to her bosom half lovingly, half sorrowfully, for even maternal love is, in its way, selfish, and dreads a rival.

"It was very cowardly of me delaying to ask your consent," said the Vicar, as Amy returned to his side, and nestled there in all the innocent boldness of avowed love.

"It is useless, I see, for me to ask Amy if she loves you," said Mr. Robinson. "Well, I suppose it must be so; but you must wait, my dear sir, I fear, for brighter days."

"Of course it must be," said the smiling and delighted mother, "and Mr. Beauflower will stay and have tea with us, out here; it is so pleasant among the flowers, and there's more air; and then he can take Amy back to the Abbey."

"I shall not walk back with Mr. Beauflower," said Amy, slipping her arm in his in her own pretty fondling way.

"Amy!" said the surprised lover.

"My dear?" said Mrs. Robinson.

"Holloh, Amy!!!" said Mr. Robinson, letting a collapsible tube of flake white fall with a clatter into his paint-box.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Amy, leading the Vicar forward, like a manageress addressing a House, "allow me to inform you, and all whom it may concern, that Miss Amy Robinson does not intend returning any more to the Abbey, and moreover, that she expects her boxes by the Slobury carrier this very night."

"Amy!" broke out everyone again.

"Merely that—to use the language of the servants, with whom those unpleasant people seemed determined to associate me—I have given them warning, and what is more, taken my leave. But shall I tell the story while we're having tea?"

"Yes, yes," said everyone. "No, no, now."

"But ah, Amy!" said Mr. Robinson, sighing as he selected a favourite old brush with only three hairs left in it; "you have been very rash and hot-headed; you would have acted differently if you had known all the trouble that has come down like an avalanche on your mother and myself this morning. Amy, we have little to depend upon now but your salary, and we cannot allow you to marry and then have to come like beggars asking for alms at your husband's door."

"Amy," said Mrs. Robinson, bursting into tears by a sudden revulsion of feeling, "that wretch Bassevi has broken all his promises, and stopped all your father's engagements. That is because

you refused him, and the major can get no rent for us from those people, and he even confessed this morning that things look rather suspicious, and that horrible grocer has sent his bill in again and told the boy to wait. I can't bear damping your joy with all this bad news, and it pains me to expose our poverty before Mr. Beauflower, but it is right I should, it is right I should."

"Never mind, my darling," said the old artist, laying down his arrows and target, his palette and brushes, and coming and kissing his wife's forehead; "we too were young once, Amy meant it for the best, she did not know all that happened."

Then Amy arose, like a Joan of Arc rising from her vow—the tears were in her eyes—but she shook them off as a rose shaken by the morning wind casts off its jewellery of dew. She drew a letter warm from her bosom that now beat faster with generous delight, and waved it in the air. She had come, like the Duchess of Montford, with countless hopes, like mailed knights in her train, to succour the beleaguered city. "Troubles or no troubles, dear mother," she said, looking radiant as the restored Eurydice, "troubles or no troubles, this is why I left the Harkers. Mrs. Harker this morning was more cruel to me than ever. She complained of my wickedly alienating Mr. Cantelupe's affections from her daughter, and

of meeting Ned secretly; she called it a clandestine intercourse unknown to my friends. She heaped on me every sort of taunting and bitter reproach. She even dared to say my marriage ought to be immediate. People talk of the old Adam, but there is also an old Eve—she rose in me then, I told her I would bear no more, I would leave that moment; so I bowed to the wicked and cruel woman, kissed dear Ethel a dozen times, gave her one of my favourite books, wished the housekeeper and one or two of the female servants who had been kind to me good bye, and instantly left the house."

"It was nobly done, Amy," said the delighted lover.

"If you had only known this bad news, Amy," said Mrs. Robinson, "God would have given you patience, I know; yes, even under that sore trial."

"God is good," said Amy, "and he has sent this rainbow after the storm." She waved the letter again. "This came last night directed to me. It is from Mr. Thorndyke, that kind curiosity dealer, who used to send you pictures to restore, and who got this situation for me at the Abbey. Not knowing your address he desires me to tell you—what do you think, dear papa?—now guess, mamma."

"Oh, don't keep us in suspense, Amy dear,"

said Mrs. Robinson, who was hanging upon her words.

"Well, I will. Why, that some rich patron of his, whose name he does not mention, has directed him to offer you, dear papa, 200*l.* a year to copy a set of Vandycks, which will be sent here, for him. The series will take many years, and is not to preclude other work. 50*l.* is to be sent in advance. Now kiss me, kiss me directly, everybody, while I dance about."

Old Robinson fell back in his chair, the brush dropped from his hand. Then he looked up and said in a low deep voice, "thank God!" He rose to kiss Amy, but she was already on her knees, folded in her mother's arms. When the two had both kissed her, she flew into Ned's arms and nestled there *en permanence.*

"I never felt so happy in my life," said Mr. Robinson, stepping out into the sunshine, and picking a great bunch of mignonette for Amy.

"And now we'll have a good cup of tea," said Mrs. Robinson, "but, oh dear, my poor old memory! I had forgotten, Amy, there is a parcel just come for you from London."

"From London?" said Amy, her eyebrows springing into an arch; "what can it be?"

The parcel was produced, it was square and compact. Amy tore at one corner of the brown

paper, and picked a hole. It revealed a square Indian box inlaid with green stained ivory and ebony; so people look at the direction of a letter, instead of at once opening and reading it.

Mr. Robinson took a knife and cut the string boldly. There appeared a costly Indian workbox, edged and cornered with bronze and silver. There was a card upon it in Cantelupe's writing, inscribed:

"For the Belle of Fontford."
"La Belle des Belles."

Amy pushed the present from her with beautiful disdain.

"I won't have it," she said, "I don't want his presents. Let him send them to Miss Harker."

"I didn't think Cantelupe knew so much French, poor fellow," said the Vicar, with the generosity of a victor. "I never could get anything into his head, for he never would read anything but the 'Racing Calendar' and 'Bell's Life.'"

The tea was the pleasantest little pic-nic conceivable. The sunlight towards sunset fell in bars and trellises across the one side of the room. The flowers wafted in their tribute of scent. Everyone laughed, chatted, and was happy, and a cup of tea was presented by unanimous consent to thirsty and receptive Mr. Lawson, who was planing busily in the next room.

All at once there was a dash of wheels, the flourish of a horn, a noisy careless impatient knock at the street door, and Cantelupe appeared, hat in hand, at the workshop door, dressed in the culmination of the latest fashion, and holding a bouquet of the rarest flowers. Just as he entered, the Vicar was holding up Amy's little white hand, and laughingly exhibiting the betrothal ring which she wore. Talleyrand himself, in poor Cantelupe's place, might have been pardoned some confusion at such an unexpected sight. He turned very red, and stammered—

"Thousand pardons—'pon my word, didn't know—Miss Robinson, I beg——"

He was, in fact, after leaving the bouquet with some indistinct words, backing and bowing himself out, when Beauflower, in his manly frank sincere way, rose, shook his hand, and forced the discomfited visitor into a chair next Mrs. Robinson, who, with great promptitude, instantly poured him out a cup of tea, and started him with a fresh muffin that smiling Susan, who, with a woman's instinct, had read at a glance what had happened and what was happening, just then brought in. Cantelupe being a man of the world, in a short time enjoyed himself as much as the rest, and told the whole story of Immenschikoff and the germinating sporules of Lycopodium that

veterinary surgeon of Shaftesbury had just found in the horse. But Amy was resolute not to accept the desk, and let him very clearly know that she was engaged to Beauflower. The purest love is cruel to the defeated. It is not in women to waste much thought on rejected lovers. Amy was polite, and no more. The game was up, as Cantelupe expressed it to himself, and Beauflower had clearly won the rubber.

"I have been a fool," he said, as he drove Beauflower home, "an immense and awful fool, and I've paid for it. Harker has foreclosed his mortgages, and the beggar is going to sell me up. I'm bankrupt both in love and fortune. I might have been sure Amy would never have me. I looked the wrong way, there was some one I might have succeeded better with and been happier with, but that too is gone. I'm a poor penniless fool, driven about anywhere by the Jews. There'll be a man in possession to-morrow at the old crib. It's hard lines, for I could pull through now if they only gave me time. Fairfield is doing his best for me. Fox and Shekell have plundered me right and left. Of course you heard how Jack Talbot and the rest of the hawks took flight when the pigeon was plucked. By Jove, sir, I was so riled I could have shot one or two of them."

"May I ask who this other lady to whom

you refer is, Cantelupe?" said Beauflower, thoughtfully.

"No, I will never mention her name to anyone. I feel I am an idiot. No woman will ever love me as you are loved. I am too wild and thoughtless, and selfish."

"Then become different, and make yourself worthy of some good girl's love. Make a great effort, man, pay off these miserable debts, and contract no more."

"Pay off—I'll sell every acre. I'll make the whole place as smooth as the palm of my hand. I won't leave a bush, but it is too late. They advertise the property next week. I see nowhere to turn for the money; Oh, I could shoot myself."

"Break out of the broad primrose path and strike at once straight, as you ride, for the narrow way. Don't listen to nonsense about evil stars, bad luck and destiny, get under a new star, force your luck on to the right rails, put your destiny again on the forge. But wo! I must get down here."

"I feel quite a new man when I hear you talk, old fellow. You had always pluck enough for a regiment. I only wish I had your resolution. Well, I will try and change myself."

"One more question," said Beauflower, as he descended from the precipice of the box seat, and stood with one foot on the roller bolt. "One

more question, and now you must answer me, Fitz, boldly, yes or no. Was it not you who sent that 80*l.* anonymously for the Chetwynd Dilapidation Fund? Come, yes or no?"

The colour mounted to Cantelupe's cheek. He caught up his whip lash and looked down at it like a scolded schoolboy. Then after a pause he said—

"Well, yes it was; and as luck would have it, I paid it in too before this awful smash came."

"You must not give it all now."

"Bosh! you don't want to offend me, do you? Are you down, old man? Yaep!—my beauties! —good-bye, Beauflower, my respects at the Vicarage. See you again soon. Mind, you must ask me to the wedding, unless I'm in quod."

Then off whirled the yellow drag round the corner by the Abbey.

"There's good in him still," said Beauflower, as he beat the garden wall with his stick.

He told the good news at home, and they were delighted, even the worthy old lady, who thought Amy would never grow old enough to manage a house.

"Poor Mr. Cantelupe," said Julia, who was teaching Wasp to beg. "I suppose that nasty Miss Harker won't have the poor fellow now he has run through all his money. She ought to be ashamed

of herself, and Miss Chivers says so too, after all she and her mother have done to attract him."

"Julia," said Beauflower, as he stooped down and carried off Wasp from his slavery, "some one somewhere said, 'pity is akin to love,' take care!"

Julia made no reply, but sat down on a footstool at her brother's feet, and pressed his hand under her chin.

"My dear Edward, do come and look here," said the worthy and unsuspecting old lady, to whose spectacled eyes the little Cupids buzzing in the air were invisible; "only just look what a feverish colour Julia has got. I told her she was not well, besides she's been crying."

"Yes, it is so," thought Beauflower, as he left the room soon afterwards. "Ju loves him, and like a true woman loves him more for his misfortunes. I pray to God that he may see his folly, and change now before too late. He has had a hard lesson enough, poor fellow."

As the Vicar changed his coat, the two letters of the morning dropped out. They were threatening letters; one from a Mr. Harpy, of Oxford, for 32*l.* 5*s.*; the other from a Mr. Clark, a fresh vulture, inclosing two more old bills, making up together 77*l.* 14*s.* 6½*d.* Unless these accounts were settled by the 12th of August (singularly enough both vultures agreed in this date; Beauflower's

marriage had been fixed for the 20th), proceedings would at once be taken. The fresh account was really owing; for the other, the receipt had been destroyed. Beauflower answered the first deprecatingly, and the second he threw into the waste paper basket.

There was but one remedy, one port of refuge now—Bassevi. The Vicar sat down and wrote to him, saying he had one or two pictures of which he wanted to dispose, if he could see him about three o'clock on the ensuing Friday. Anything to stave off the pressing trouble. He would also get his mother to try and persuade the insurance society to give him six or seven hundred pounds for her policy; anything to enable him to pay that galling debt, and rescue him from the *Pieuvre.*

There were tears in his eyes as he sat poring over his accounts and trying to make them balance less on the wrong side, when the door opened and Julia, with her hair down, stole in, and silently kissing him, looked into his eyes sorrowfully; she, the proud, gay Beatrice, who usually seemed never to have known a care.

"You have some great sorrow, Ned?" she said, kneeling before him with her hands in his; "I have long seen it. You have now always those dreadful accounts before you. Are you in debt, dear? open your heart to me."

"Yes, I am, Ju, and overwhelmed. There is little or no hope. I dare not tell Amy, nor my mother; there is only one resource, and that I must try. I must pay a few of the pressing debts, get a little money for the weekly demands of the church, and for my wedding tour, and live frugally till the next tithes come in."

Julia consoled him by all sorts of hopeful schemes, and by denunciations of money in general.

All at once he thrust back the accounts over which they were poring, and held her face between his hands underneath the great fall of glossy dark hair that streamed over them; as he looked intently into her eyes, which had never before quailed under his glance, they shrank and closed like weather-telling flowers at the passing of a thunder-cloud.

"Julia, you love him?" he said, that was all.

Then the fountains of her heart burst forth into quick, hot, impetuous tears, she hid her head on his shoulder, and murmured,

"Yes; I love him. I love him."

CHAPTER XII.

TESTING THE DIAMOND.

On the Friday, August 10, George, more affected on parting with his master for fou 1 days than perhaps strict temperance demanded, drove him with the Cuyps, carefully packed, to the 10.15 a.m. train at Slobury.

The Vicar took with him the two jewel-cases that he was to leave for Mr. Goodrick with Mr. Hoffman, at Number 7, Dorset Chambers, Austin Friars; he placed them in his breast pocket, and took care not to go to sleep during the journey for fear of any danger. He drove on arriving straight to the New Hummums, and, having dressed and dined, went and called on his cousin Fairfield, at 5, Furnival's Inn.

Fairfield was as pleasant and as preoccupied as ever. He was coming Beauflower's way early in September, probably the 3rd, to superintend the sale of that unfortunate young fellow's property at Swallowcliff, and to try and make some salvage

out of it, but he feared the sum realised would not much more than clear off the mortgages.

The letter Beauflower had received from Bassevi the day before he left Wiltshire ran thus,

122, Charlotte Street, Fitzroy Square,
August 8, 1866.

"Dear Sir,—I well remember my visit to your house. I am very busy just now taking stock, as my partner, Mr. Zöllner, is talking of going to settle in New York, but I will make a point of being at home next Wednesday at 3 p.m. if you will do me the honour of calling at Charlotte Street. I shall be happy to give you a fair price for the two Cuyps, the little carving you showed me, and any other valuables, or to advance money upon them, but I am afraid we shall differ considerably as to their trade value. Buying and selling are two different things, and persons unaccustomed to the fluctuations of business are often inclined to ask preposterous sums for very doubtful articles.

"I am, dear Sir,

"Yours faithfully,

"Isaac Bassevi.

"Rev. Edward Beauflower.

"P.S. Please to inquire for me at the left hand door, the picture-restorer's."

Beauflower had confided a few of his troubles

to Fairfield, who had strongly advised him not to surrender his mother's policy for less than 500*l.* unless very hard pressed; at her age the loss was obvious, moreover the surrender would be a matter of some little time, and would not meet any present emergency. It would be better to borrow money at a high rate of interest than do that. When Beauflower mentioned his intended marriage to Amy Robinson, Fairfield (imperturbable as he usually was) unmistakeably started, asked if Mr. Goodrick was aware of his intention, and seemed relieved when he heard that he was. As for the threats of those rascally Oxford attorneys the Vicar might disregard those, they were mere attempts at extortion, but he must carefully look for his receipts.

At ten o'clock on the Tuesday morning Beauflower left the New Hummums, took a turn in Covent Garden to enjoy the scent and colour of that pleasant central avenue, then started for Austin Friars to deposit his treasures in the hands of Mr. Hoffmann, the German commissioner for the Berlin Winter Exhibition. He turned into that quiet monastic region by the Dutch church, and, with some little difficulty, found No. 7, Dorset Chambers. Reading down the names on the door-post he discovered on the second floor Messrs. Huth and Zimmermann, the German wool-

merchants, to whom parcels for Mr. Hoffmann were to be entrusted. Beauflower scaled the dark funereal stairs and reached the second landing, where there was a glass-door with the names of Huth and Zimmermann painted on it in black letters. Entering, he inquired over the inky battlement that enclosed the clerks, if Mr. Hoffmann was in.

"Your name, sir?" said a sharp clerk, sliding from his stool southward towards him.

"Mr. Hoffmann does not know my name," said Beauflower, "but I have brought a small parcel from Mr. Goodrick of Buckingham Street for the Berlin Exhibition."

"Very sorry, sir, but Mr. Hoffmann left for Germany yesterday, and we were told to tell any one who called that it was too late to forward any more articles to Berlin."

"That is very unfortunate. I was to have brought them up last Friday, but I was prevented."

"I think I heard the name of Goodrick," said a gentleman with one pen behind his ear, and another in his hand, coming from an inner room; "I believe, sir, you have brought some jewels that Mr. Hoffmann was expecting.

Beauflower explained the matter and regretted the delay.

"Mr. Hoffmann," said the gentleman with the

two pens, "was much disappointed at going without them, as he told me they were remarkably fine specimens of their kind, and of great value. Might I be allowed to see them? I have myself rather a taste for these things."

Beauflower assented with pleasure, drew out the two cases and opened them. The merchant's eyes glistened as he laid down one of his pens and handled the blue diamond as if it was a preserved fruit he was going to swallow. He held it in every light, and looked into it as a watchmaker looks into a watch. The opal, too, with its milky fire charmed him much.

"So! a very beautiful stone, indeed," he said, "almost equal to the Hope diamond; and as good an opal too as I ever saw out of Vienna. These jewels would have been great acquisitions at Berlin." Then he spoke a few words in German to one of the clerks. "Ah! yes; my clerk tells me that Mr. Hoffmann does not wish them sent; he would not insure such valuables arriving safe. *Les escrocs sont si adroits.* The thieves are so clever, they get inklings of these things. I really wouldn't trust my own brother with such stones; we commercial men get so suspicious, you see."

The Vicar put up the jewels in their cases, thanked Mr. Huth for his politeness, and returned to the Hummums. He then, according to promise,

went to Mr. Goodrick's chambers. It was now nearly twelve. He found the laundress, as usual, slightly obscured, and too redolent of the fatal juniper berry.

She had been werry 'ticklar about airing the rooms. Hoped Master was quite well and had had no return of those faint feelings. The gas people had been about their money, and two gentlemen had called one morning and said they had walked in from the country to see Mr. Goodrick and would like to sit down a bit, but this request she refused; and since then the police had been round and told her to take care as there were some swell mobsmen about a-robbing of gentlemen's chambers, so that was a merciful visitation. Mr. Greenfell, on the third floor, had been taken very ill on the stairs one night a week since; he could not unlock his door, and frightened her and her husband very much, but it had been since found Mr. G. had been out to the Freemasons. Would Mr. Beauflower mention these facts to Master, and would he like to sit down?

The Vicar refused to sit down but promised to give a faithful report of the various transactions enumerated.

Then he went out, strolled to the end of the street, and looked through the spiked grating at the old sooty water-gate of Zimri's palace, with its

scollop shells, stone globes, and the almost illegible motto of the Villiers,—

"Fidei coticula crux."

(The Cross is the whetstone of Faith),—

the long plain letters of which were filled up with black grime. The steps were all awry, up which Waller and Charles the Second, Killigrew and Rochester, may have stepped, and laughing Nell Gwynne tripped. There were green pads of moss now between the joints of the broken steps, and port-wine coloured mud, cold and purply, marked the line of the ebb tide, which was washing up with a dull, recurrent flap against the murky side of some old coal barges at Hungerford Stairs.

Just struck one; two hours longer. The Vicar strolled into the National Gallery, looked at the grand old head of Gevartius, and the Bardolphian face of Rembrandt, and thought of the hours old Robinson—blessed with a taste of art, and cursed with a mediocrity of talent—had spent there surrounded by all the effete crew of chattering copiers, and slavish imitators of technicalities and accident. The rooms were stivy, the ordinary visitors vulgar, stupid and tasteless. He was glad to get out again, and see that by St. Martin's clock it was a quarter to two. Then, passing by the pert statue of Charles the First, tossing its empty head at the Banqueting House window

to the west, where the stubborn and faithless monarch once met with rather a disagreeable accident, he crossed over to the Horse-Guards, and, thinking of poor young Brown and his follies, looked up for a moment at those handsome but costly chimney-piece ornaments, the two life guardsmen in the niches at the entrance, and smiled to see a smart maid-servant, running across the road with a foaming pot of porter, awake tender recollections, and something very like a wink in the stern eye of the right hand horseman, who previously had seemed like an enchanted Barbarossa waiting for the Last Trumpet to summon him to Armageddon. *Two*, clashed the clocks, with an irregular file-firing of clang and boom. The Vicar passed through the dark archway, where the regiment that never fought but one battle strode, or lolled on benches outside the guard-room. The air was fresher on the Parade. The trees on the Mall side were sickening here and there with premature autumn. The Vicar ascended the steps at the foot of the column of the greatest general (as to disastrous failures) of modern times, and eyed him with respect where he stood high up out of the reach of his creditors with the bill file of a lightning conductor protruding from his stony skull. The street of Clubs; Boodle watching at his eternal

window, and Noodle glowering at another; he passed up steep St. James's Street, and struck eastward for Regent Street; he admired the grand sweeping curve of the Quadrant, and, getting into Oxford Street, all a-buz with ladies shopping and passing their time agreeably in ruining their husbands, he eventually reached Tottenham Court Road, and turned round by Percy Street into the Fitzroy Square district. A Bohemian, dubious, night-haunted part of the district, he traversed, full of shy shops, suspicious lodging-houses, and doubtful trades.

It was not difficult to find No. 122. There it was, half-way down on the left-hand side, two doors from a French washerwoman and clear starcher's. It was a large, blank-looking shop, with no one apparently in it, and next it a showy pawnbroker's, with the gilt names of Bassevi and Zöllner, ominous golden balls swinging high over the door, and the usual convenient side alley into which the well-worn swing doors opened to let in and let out—Poverty, Theft, Murder, Drunkenness and Shame. The windows were filled breast-high with dingy trinkets, gaudy parasols, opera glasses, revolvers, rings and miniatures. The window of the picture restorer's shop, broad and dusty, contained nothing but a large engraving of one of Raphael's cartoons, a line engraving of the

Princess Charlotte, an objectionable Jordaens, and one of those piebald half-cleaned portraits, "party per pale" white and dark, and a tattered Landscape by Ruysdal, with an inscription on it avowing Mr. Bassevi's intention to exhibit the *identical* picture (a good deal turned upon that), whole, cleaned and in its right mind, that very day month. The Vicar looked at his watch; it was just five minutes past three.

He crossed the street to the door, but it was locked. He knocked, and there came that smart young man, the beloved of Susan, looking as pink and ingenuous as a pawnbroker's apprentice could well be expected to look.

"He thought Mr. Bassevi was in; but he was either engaged or just going out. He had an appointment at Christie and Manson's at four."

The Vicar was just shaking out a refractory card when Mr. Bassevi in a white coat, a white hat rather on one side, his hands in his pockets, his mouth full, and moving in an atmosphere redolent of brown sherry, emerged from a back room, that opened by a glazed glass-door into the shop.

"I was just going," he said, roughly, like a man on his own dunghill; "thought you had forgotten your appointment. Very busy this week cataloguing Lord Frogmore's pictures in Harley Street—can give you five minutes" (so saying he

pulled out a monstrous old gold repeater that might have belonged to Sporus, Bufo, or some other of Pope's horrors). "This way, sir!"

The Vicar apologised for being a few minutes late, and followed the detestable wretch between stacks of ungilt picture frames, and dusty canvasses, that, once pictures, seemed now to have turned into mere rubbish. Bassevi stopped once at a coarse Dutch flower picture.

"That's a nice little bit of Vandervool," he said, with a wave of his pudgy jewelled hand, hideous with neglected nails, and grimed with London dust.

"Very curious!"

Then he shut the door, threw himself in a sort of Wilberforce attitude in a dirty dimity-covered easy chair, and motioned the Vicar to a seat on a frowzy, greasy sofa, that smelt of tobacco smoke.

"Now, about these Cuyps—shall we say fifteen each? Where are they?"

"I left them at the Hummums; but you, no doubt, remember them sufficiently."

"That's a pity. I don't like advancing money on a pig in a poke. One was pretty well, the other so-so. Well then, let's say 30*l.* each—that is 10*l.* too much for the one and 5*l.* too much for the other. Want to part with the carving?"

"Those pictures," said Beauflower, a little angrily, "cost my father a large sum at the Beckford sale, and have since that been valued at considerably more money."

"If they were not worth double, do you think," said Bassevi, with a hideous leer of cunning, "that I'd lend you 60*l.* on them? That is not the style we do our business. Oh, no, sir! Well, 60*l.* for the Cuyps, and let's say 10*l.* for the carving. I would not give more than 15*l.* for it in any sale room, so that's doing the handsome thing by you, mister. I'm always losing by these specs. There's them Vandykes I bought of Mr. Cantelupe (he wouldn't part with the best because they were the nobs of the family), and they're just a dead lot left on my hands."

"That head is an exquisite piece of carving. Mr. Pugin once offered my father 50*l.* for it. I won't let it go for that."

"As you like—as you like! You won't catch me giving 50*l.* for it. Still, I don't want to haggle, let's say 15*l.* for it. It's a mere loan, you know, at the usual interest of our business. I will send for them to-morrow, and the cheque shall come by the young man who calls for them. He's a steady lad, you may depend upon his bringing them here safely, and I'll tell him to

take a cab. If you'll allow me, I'll go and make out the usual form."

The glass-door slammed, and the Vicar was left alone. Seventy-five pounds! what was that to throw as a sop to the *Pieuvre?* There were the Oxford tradesmen—there was the insatiable builder—there was the Chetwynd fund to restore—there was the marriage tour to provide for! Where should he turn? What should he do now he had begun to rake together money? The policy! No; it was cruel to touch that and throw away 1500*l.* for 500*l.* or at most 700*l.*—no, he would not touch that! He felt Bassevi had cheated him; but still some relief was obtained, and after all it was only a loan. As he searched for a certain statement of accounts that he had drawn up that morning at breakfast, and put his hand into his breast pocket it came upon the two jewel cases. That instant the ever ready Fiend hurled a temptation at him and pierced him before his conscience could throw on her armour. If he had once grappled with the demon he would have thrown it, but the dart struck him so deep and quick that he had no power to resist. It was the one resource left. "Dangerous!—Dishonourable!" said a faint voice far away; "Absurd and childish scruples," said the Tempter, loud and boldly, "to a man of principle there is no danger! The

jewels cannot be sent to Berlin. A slight evasion will conceal from their owner that they have not gone. Before he can hear from Berlin your emergency will have passed, and you can restore them with some excuse; or worst come to the worst, you can transfer the Policy and redeem them. Miss the opportunity and you will be a disgraced and dishonoured man—disgraced before your fellow clergy—before the builder—before your parishioners—before Amy! Pledge the jewels, it will hurt no one, and it will save you!" Then Beauflower embraced the Fiend, and welcomed him as though he had been an Angel of Light.

Mr. Bassevi returned, a crafty smile on his face, and handed the tickets for the two Cuyps and the carving.

"I have here," said Beauflower, rather nervously, and in a low voice, "two jewels—a diamond and an opal, on which I want an advance. They are very fine, and of great value."

A lurid ray shot from Bassevi's eyes, which, however, instantly resumed their usual lowering look of unabashed cunning. His cat-like nature was on the work, eager for the unexpected prey. He tried to appear indifferent but he could not succeed, although Beauflower was too anxious to observe him closely, and indeed by nature too frank and unsuspicious to regard him with the fear he

merited. The man opened the cases and looked contemptuously to the blue diamond whose magic lustre lighted the dark case.

"Ah! these," he said, "are very common now. They're only Brazilian stones, and the colour is against them—badly cut too. Blocky—very blocky, and too thick at the girdle. If the small facets were sharper it would have had twice the lustre. These stones go entirely by weight—we'll weigh it." Bassevi opened the glass-door and called the boy. "Tom, run to Mr. Zöllner and ask him for his scales to weigh a diamond. Quick, my boy."

"It is of very great value, I have been told," said Beauflower.

"My dear sir, if you only knew what I do about diamonds, you would be astonished. I'll just tell you a little anecdote. A lady of rank who was in distress lately sent to me to come and value her jewels. I knew very well that that meant an advance upon them. Her husband had been a collector of precious stones, and had also bought a great many for his wife. Well, I went; she showed me her diamonds—very fine they were. Then she brought from a cabinet what she called a very large rough diamond of enormous value—priceless value, as she thought. Now, we have every week colourless topazes, emeralds,

sapphires, and white zircons, brought here and offered us for diamonds. I doubted my friend. While my lady turned her back I just passed a small file across its surface sharply, it left scratches. Bless your soul, it was no more a diamond than I'm a diamond—it was a merely large lump of white spinel. Still I was not satisfied, so I took it home and tried it with a diamond. Bless you, in half an hour I had cut a long grove in it. I tried it with a prism and it failed. I then rubbed it and it was not electric. In fact, it broke down every way, and I refused to advance a pound upon it, to the lady's great mortification."

Bassevi then breathed on the blue diamond, and weighed it; each time he shook his head. The lad had brought the scales with the measures. The scales were little films of brass, each weighing a carat, an Indian word derived from the name of a certain seed used by the Hindoo diamond merchants in weighing their gems. One by one the rogue dropped in the square films of brass, and expressed some surprise as the stone went down at eight carats.

"That is no common diamond," said Beauflower; "it has been compared to the Hope diamond."

"Hope diamond!" sneered Bassevi, "why it couldn't hold a candle to it. That weighs one hundred and seventy-seven grains, and has ten

times the fire in it. Pooh! this is largish, but it's an every-day stone. We had a better one last week. You know what the trade give a carat for diamonds?"

"I don't, indeed!" said Beauflower, with perfect openness. "I must trust entirely to your honour."

"Which you may quite rely on. Our trade goes entirely by this little green book here—'Jeffries' Treatise on Diamonds and Pearls, 1751.' There is a table of weights and prices. Yes; here it is, page 11." Bassevi ran his finger down the prices, "6, $6\frac{1}{4}$, 7, $7\frac{3}{8}$. Yes; here it is, 8 carats, 512*l.* Well, if this diamond, whatever its defects may be in my opinion, answers all the tests, we can afford to advance 220*l.* upon it; and on this opal, which is no great things, say another 40*l.*—260*l.*, that's about our figure, sir."

Beauflower said he thought the offer small considering the undeniable value of the two jewels; but as it was to meet a mere temporary necessity he would accept the offer of the 260*l.* Could he have it at once?

"No; not till certain preliminary forms have been gone through, and above all not till the diamond had been submitted to the inspection of a Dutch diamond merchant, a friend of mine, in (Simmaryaxe) St. Mary Axe. If Mr. Beauflower will call about eight o'clock the following

evening, I will conclude the matter either one way or the other, and without a doubt, I should say, will hand you a cheque for the amount."

Beauflower almost liked the rough, off-hand way of the man, treating things in such a broad general manner, and careless of bargaining.

"You must leave the jewels," Bassevi said; "that of course you have no objection to do. I shall give you a formal receipt for them. Good-bye! I'm glad you came here, and did not go to that Thorndyke, whom the old gentleman down at your place patronizes. He'd have let you in. Oh, he's a sharp practiser, he is. Well, good-bye. Tom, call a Hansom for me. I must be off to my appointment."

As Bassevi leaped into the cab and tucked his villanous white hat under the roôf, he said to himself,—

"By the Lord Harry, that's the smartest thing I ever did. Green as grass as I'm a Dutchman. Minories, Cabby, and quick as you like."

Had all thought of Amy vanished from her lover's mind in that whirlpool of excitement, in those long and "leaden footed hours" that he spent waiting for the evening when he should again meet Bassevi and clutch the eagerly wished-for money? No! her image had receded faint and far, it had dimmed like a fading photograph, but

it hovered over him still—she looked forth from that great white cloud that hung over the Admiralty, he saw her in the sky over the Abbey, he fancied she was sitting beside him in the Park as on that memorable day at the edge of Everley wood. He almost started at faces in Piccadilly that seemed at a distance to be so like her's, yet changed into unlikeness as they approached nearer. Her face looked upon him out of the London heaven mournfully, like those reproachful faces that come in dreams to men straying from the right path, yet his pride refused to allow the justice of the reproach.

How long the day seemed in the strange place, among cold, hard faces, among the pushing selfish crowd! How he missed his own quiet home and the life and choristers of Nature! Again he found himself wandering past pictures and statues, at which the same vulgar people seemed ever staring and gaping; again he tramped over the pitiless stones of London streets, and found himself looking at the same useless luxuries, and in at the same windows, so that he hardly knew whether yesterday and to-day were not one and the same, and the intervening night an empty dream. He took the steam-boat and patrolled the river from bridge to bridge, still the heedless sun would not hurry its setting.

Again he found himself at the statue of the unwise king, and again turned his steps towards the Horse-Guards. The same immovable men on the black marble horses, their steel breast-plates glittering, their swords shining in the slant sunshine. All at once from under the grim peak of a helmet the eyes of one of the soldiers smiled a melancholy recognition. Yes, it was, it was young Brown, pipe clayed and rated and tamed by stern corporals and reviling sergeants—subdued to a mere machine, and, to judge by his contrite look, sorely repentant. Beauflower nodded, and said,—

"All well at home," as he passed on.

Slowly, very slowly, the sun sank down over the Kensington roofs, then, snatching a hasty dinner at some place out of Regent Street, Beauflower proceeded towards Charlotte Street. A strange feeling of alarm and apprehension filled his mind as the lamps began to light one by one, but he dismissed it as a foolish symptom of groundless anxiety. The diamond was of great value—the advance upon it of the sum he required was certain. It was easy for him to reclaim it; worst come to the worst, if he had even to tell his weakness to Mr. Goodrick, it would not be deemed by him, under the circumstances, any very unpardonable offence, consider-

ing the jewel case had arrived too late for the Prussian commissioner.

Bassevi's shop was quite dark when he arrived at the door and rung the bell. It was answered by the young man, who looked anxious and uncomfortable. Before he could speak to him Bassevi himself appeared. He had his hat on, and wore a short, rough pilot coat. He was blunter, rougher, and more suspicious in manner than he had been the day before. He seemed all business now, as if he had drawn the sword of commerce and thrown away the scabbard of mere formal politeness. He showed the Vicar into the back shop that was lit by a flickering gaselier that gave but a low wavering light.

Bassevi was dry and curt. The jewel case lay on the table beside a pile of Sèvres china plates, a dish of Majolica, and some old ivory triptychs.

"Well, Mr. Beauflower," Bassevi said, "I took this diamond last night to my adviser on these subjects, Mr. Da Costa, an Amsterdam merchant, luckily now in town."

"Yes?"

"And he applied the usual tests."

"Yes?"

"And the result of these tests, I am sorry to say, were decidedly unfavourable."

"The man seems blunt and straightforward

enough," thought Beauflower, "this is only his coquetry."

"So unfavourable, indeed, that I and my partner, Mr. Zöllner, agreed that it would be impossible to advance any money at all upon it."

The Vicar's countenance fell.

"Still he confessed he could not say for certain. But he advised me by all means to ask you to allow it to be submitted to our one final and infallible test."

"And what is that?"

"You can read about it yourself. It is in this book I have here, that diamond merchants always keep by them. 'Jean Baptiste Tavernier's Voyages en Turquie, en Perse, et aux Indes, 1677-79.'" (Bassevi's French was detestably pronounced, with a gabbling Jewish accent, but he understood the language well enough commercially).

Beauflower read the following passage (vol. i. p. 326), which in English ran thus:—"The diamond merchants who bring jewels from Golconda to Stamboul to sell to the Grand Seignior disclosed to me as a great and precious secret their only infallible and unerring way to distinguish a true diamond, the counterfeits of which are so numerous and so hard to detect. If the diamond is true adamant, it can be placed upon an anvil and struck with the full force of a heavy hammer,

and still remain unmarred and without a flaw, so pure and dense is the substance of this divine crystal of crystals."

Beauflower was so nervous that he read all this over once, then flew at it again and read it through from the beginning.

"That is the one sole infallible test of the trade, and we use it daily; it is generally kept as a secrèt by our people, but I am blunt and frank, and despise all that d—— freemasonry nonsense."

Beauflower opened the case and drew out the diamond.

"It looks rather darker," he said, "by this light."

"Ah! that merely depends on the way it is lit. The Hope diamond, you know, looks like an amethyst by candle-light. Breathe on it and it will look lighter."

The Vicar held it in his hand and thought for a moment. His brain was reeling with excitement.

"Yes," he said, "I know it is a pure stone and of great value, I will submit it to any test."

"It is done in a moment," said Bassevi, with a business-like air; "we always keep the simple apparatus ready."

As he said this, he dived into a dark corner

on one side of an old Buhl bureau, and dragged out an anvil some three feet high, with the usual horn of iron at one end. It was an old anvil, and slightly hollowed in the centre by incessant blows of the hammer.

"If the stone is a pure diamond and of the first water, as you perhaps very justly believe," said Bassevi, drawing forth a heavy hammer, with a head weighing about four pounds, "this hammer will do it no more harm than a drop of rain does the dome of Saint Paul's.

"I have no fear," said Beauflower.

Bassevi took the jewel-case from the Vicar's yielding grasp, breathed on the jewel, praised its colour, weighed it in his hand.

"No doubt it will be all right," he said, as he placed it in the cup of the anvil, and drew back the hammer to get a fair blow.

"You have no fears as to the experiment, Mr. Beauflower? Now, come, do you mean to say your pulse beats steady and as usual?"

"I don't mean to deny I feel some small anxiety," said Beauflower; "but it is merely because I am unaccustomed to the testing of jewels."

"May I strike now when I say three?"

"Yes, by all means."

Bassevi touched the diamond as it shot forth its pale blue rays to get it perfectly even. Then

he motioned Mr. Beauflower to one side, so that the gaslight might shine full upon the anvil. He raised the heavy hammer, swung it twice in the air, then poised it.

"You give the signal, Mr. Beauflower—once, twice, thrice, and at the third time I will strike. There is my cheque-book ready, you see, on the table."

Once—*twice*—THRICE.

At the word "thrice," the hammer rose and fell. There was a jar of smitten iron, a splintering crash, and a shower of fragments of the supposed diamond flew right and left. The blue diamond had failed under the severe test, and had broken into a thousand pieces.

Beauflower's brain swam; the room seemed to go round. He would have fallen to the ground had not Bassevi run to him with a chair, and then brought him a glass of wine from a half-full decanter that stood on the table. He stood resting the hammer on the table, eyeing the pale and distressed face of the young Vicar.

"You see," he said, "this wonderful blue diamond of yours was merely some common crystal tinged by nature or art. A pretty thing if I had advanced two or three hundred pounds upon it, by Jove! I should have put my foot in it with a vengeance. Now, to show you how I

value this sham diamond dust, you shall see what I do with it."

Then sweeping up a dozen of the chief fragments into a shovel, and kicking away the rest right and left contemptuously, he threw up the window and tossed them into a back alley, where a party of street children could be heard playing.

"I had no conception it could be a counterfeit. You will take my word, I'm sure, for that. The jewel was a family jewel, and must be replaced."

"My dear sir," said Bassevi, taking the Vicar's moist and powerless hand, that rested languidly on the empty jewel-case, "I have entire reliance on your word. We are all deceived sometimes. You remember my story of the lady of rank and the celebrated rough diamond. Ha! ha! I have been taken in before now. Well, now, as to the opal. That also is of less value than you think; still it is a good one, but it discolours upon being tested by electricity, as you see, and it will need repolishing to restore it. I'll see to that."

Bassevi opened the case, and there sure enough was the opal looking yellow and dimmed, its inner fire gone out. The Vicar had no heart to bargain now.

"I will say 30*l.* for that, though we do not

much want it, because you seem rather depressed at the diamond proving so worthless.

Beauflower rose to his feet by a great effort. His eyes seemed suddenly to have lost their lustre, like the opal.

"Mr. Bassevi," he said, "I would not have had this happen for a thousand pounds. It must be replaced at any cost. Can a stone of similar size and colour be produced for 400*l.* and within two months?"

Bassevi sat down a moment with one foot on the anvil, the head of the fatal hammer moving over the crystal dust, white and opaque, that still lay upon the iron. His hand moved thoughtfully about his mouth, and his greedy eyes remained half closed.

"Yes," he said, "I think I could promise you one. It is the most fortunate thing in the world for you that my friend Da Costa is still in town. He will find you one either at Paris or Amsterdam. It shall weigh eight carats, and be a blue diamond of the same size and character. There are pieces here large enough to match the colour; but I shall need security, you know. These sort of people are very cautious, and it is a large sum to pay out of pocket. You must give me an I O U for 250*l.* as a deposit."

"Give me pen and paper," said Beauflower,

resolved to at once transfer his mother's policy and to save his imperilled honour. "I can depend on you and on your secresy. I have reasons why this must be kept secret."

"Mum's the word," said Bassevi, putting his dirty hand upon his coarse mouth; "our profession is all secrets. You may depend on me. I shall get you a diamond that could not be known from the real stone. I will defy the keenest connoisseur to detect it. Diamonds with bluish tinges are by no means rare. Give me time, my dear sir, and I will match any diamond you are pleased to bring me like a ribbon. Let us say this day two months; I think I can promise it by that time. I have your address."

Beauflower thanked him warmly, and left the shop, bowed out by the now more courteous picture-restorer. The Jew watched him down the street, and when he was fairly round the corner he slammed the door, went into his inner room, turned up the gas, threw the anvil and hammer into their dark corner; then casting himself into a chair, he burst into a hard, vulgar, braying, contemptuous fit of laughter, and slapping his right thigh with his hand, shouted—

"Nicked, by the Tabernacle shtones! nicked, by the Holy Prophet! nicked! O Lord, isn't he green! Nicked, by all the devils, nicked!"

In a dark corner behind the glass-door, whose glazing was scratched off here and there, there was, however, a frightened listener who had heard and seen everything.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN IN THE PARABLE.

THE golden day had come, and Summerleas was buzzing like a hive in April. "Kling, klang, klong," went the three bells, making the most of themselves, and chasing each other up and down their limited gamut. A flag waved from the nearly completed tower; it looked like a scarlet blossom on an old aloe, that flowers only once after a hundred years' parturition. The village having put off its club-feast several weeks, was going to celebrate it on this day, the twenty-fifth of August, as a compliment to their young Vicar.

In the boundless happiness of the moment, Beauflower forgot even the *Pieuvre* that lurked in a distant corner of his mind, waiting to rush again upon his prey. Fully relying on Bassevi's promise to procure an exact fac-simile of the blue diamond, that bitter trouble he had also, for the time, cast behind him. The sunshine of joy had

dispelled every cloud, and the glow of happiness was warm at his heart. Amy's tranquil delight was reflected upon him, and his sanguine and impetuous nature had devised a thousand ways of getting rid of all his difficulties. The coronation day of his life had come, and what were petty troubles to him now? mere road-side nettles that he trod under foot as he passed singing on his way to receive Heaven's choicest blessing.

The Vicar, disregarding the fashionable etiquette in such matters, and determined not to lead the poor old discomfited artist into any expense, had contrived that the wedding breakfast should be at his own house; a dreadful time of it old Mrs. Beauflower's servants accordingly had; but when a marriage is in the case, what woman cares for trouble? the house was, therefore, notwithstanding, as merry as a house could well be, and the servants sung like thrushes as they toiled at the cakes and tartlets.

The club had begun to assemble at the churchyard gate about ten o'clock. All reaping had been suspended for the day; as the weather was steady, it did not much matter, and Farmer Brown willingly submitted to that small inconvenience. The bright ploughshare rested half way in the furrow; the sickles were hanging up on the cottage wall beside the rows of blue plates. Everybody had

a holiday; all the school children were drawn up, with flowers ready to scatter in the path to the church door, in a band, with the whitest of pinafores, and the rosiest of laughing faces; the schoolmistress herself stood at the head of the cherub army, as happy as any of them, and having a distinct eye to matrimony in the shape of a handsome young exciseman at Birdbrook, a nephew of worthy old Farmer Brown. The children had all been drilled in their important part of the ceremonial, with as much care as the royal champion is in riding backwards before that ceremony which we all pray to God we may never live to see again. They were as delighted and as nervous as a stage *débutante* the first night of her appearance.

The club was a picture worthy of Teniers. It needed all his dainty touching, as Mr. Robinson very happily said; but it wanted more than that, it required Stothard's tenderness and goodness to appreciate those shrewd old faces, wrinkled and reddened by the wind and rain of many winters; bronzed and browned by the scorch of many summers. It called for Wilkie's humour to give the quiet delight of the old faces, the gravity of Mr. Pitt and of the other portly churchwarden. It demanded, in a word, Millais' exquisite finish, Marks's quaint fun, Calderon's picturesque breadth, and Frith's piquancy, to reproduce that group

with the blue and white rosettes, that stood gossiping beside the big drum, and waiting for the marriage procession that in a few minutes was to emerge from the garden gate of the Vicarage of Summerleas.

On the skirt of the crowd, lingered Paddy, tipsy, as he always was; now pale, wretched, hopeless, a very skeleton at the feast, he kept moaning to himself that he had never drugged the horse. Not far from him was a gloomy-looking stranger, whom no one knew; and who, it was supposed, had stopped in passing by merely out of curiosity. "He looked," the old clerk said, "like the man in the parable, who came to the feast, but had not on the marriage garment."

A woman's voice may be soft and melodious as an angel's, or a nightingale's; but it is never tuned to its fullest harmony till love speaks from her lips; a woman may be as beautiful as one of those daughters of Paradise who welcome the Moslem martyr at the gates of Heaven; but you will never see her in the full meridian of her beauty, till you see her on her marriage morning, But why talk of the abstract? It is of Amy, of Amy that we speak. Never an April daybreak showed more of sunshine and rosy cloud than her eyes showed the conflict and the quick passing of emotions. They flitted across her sen-

sitive face (and of all beauty an intelligent sensitiveness, such as that with which the Greeks invested their Clyte, is the most incomparable). To look at her was to love her; to know her, was, as Steele beautifully said of some noble woman, in itself a liberal education. There is no word to express how she looked in her wedding dress of white silk, but the inflated French adjective *ravissant*. How charmingly the silk fitted, clinging tightly round her little waist, and following the undulations of her form; how like a Vesta she looked in her white veil; with what modest and winning grace she led the choir of pretty bridesmaids! Poor Ethel was at that moment far away, weeping like a young Niobe under a golden cascade of her own beautiful hair; her mother having refused to allow her to attend the wedding. The three Miss Chetwynds, poor girls, looked very pretty in their white flowing muslin, and orange flowers, and they carried bouquets of odorous orange-blossoms in their hands. The two daughters of the rector of Birdbrook, pretty blooming girls with *retroussé* noses, and wonderfully alike, completed this delightful division of the procession. It was, perhaps, unfortunate that Mr. Robinson, who was nervously happy, would wear a tail-coat; but such was his custom, and fashion with a sigh yielded to his changeless habit.

The bridegroom was not handsome, his features were not perfect; but he looked the very perfection of manliness that bridal morning. Not yet at the meridian of life, that centre of the arch, "the *mezzo cammin*," that Dante fixed at thirty-five. Time, the thief who steals our youth grain by grain, and whose only gifts are like "the gifts of the genii which are curses," wrinkles and grey hairs, tokens of his power, had passed him by as yet. He was just reaching the acme of his bodily and mental vigour. His rich brown hair clustered over a well developed and characteristic forehead; his eyes were clear and brilliant with love and with intelligence, his form was elastic and full of pliant life. There was nothing about him of that timid, sapless, and puerile mawkishness that too often distinguishes the young clergyman. There was little of the milksop, the pedant, or the prig about Edward Beauflower, who had pulled a good oar at college, put on the gloves with the "Norfolk Bantam" himself, and held his own against the agile "Spider." At Oxford he had run, leaped, and swam with the best, and had been once stroke in the University boat. Many a look of love and admiration greeted him as he emerged from the Vicarage garden, followed by the major, stupendous in a bran new blue frock coat and white trousers (he had not advanced

much since the fashion of twenty years ago, when he went to India, and ascended the Mountains of the Moon), and a white rosette, not very much smaller than a sunflower. The flies from Fontford had just brought Amy and the bridesmaids, and they shone like a snow drift as they passed over the green glebe meadow. Cantelupe was there as happy and radiant as if he had just come *into* a fortune instead of out of one, and Mr. Goodrick was there in a blue frock coat and white waistcoat, and, with his nankeen face slightly ruddy at the cheek bones, he looked the very picture of an old cultivated English gentleman. Dr. Briscoe was happy, sturdy, and honest as usual.

The moment the first glimpse of bridal white appeared, the major, who had taken a most vivid interest in the matter, gave a shout, the pre-arranged signal for the band, which instantly burst forth in a drumming, reckless manner, wholly heedless of time. (They took no heed of time but by its loss.) The tune they selected was "Come haste to the Wedding," which was quickly followed by "The Red, White, and Blue." It was well meant, but it must be confessed somewhat old-fashioned. Farmer Brown, Mr. Pitts, and George, gaunt in Sunday dress, and over decorated with white rosettes, took off their hats as the procession approached, and the school children began to carol

out a hymn with their fresh innocent voices, sweet as a chorus of spring birds. From the open church door, the soft sounds of the harmonium breathed forth, like the music from a distance that one hears in a dream. Already the shadow of the old church porch had fallen on Amy, when the murky silent man, before mentioned, and whom no one had hitherto regarded, except as a mere passer-by attracted by curiosity, stepped forward with a stamped paper in his hand, touched the Vicar on the shoulder, and said in a low voice, only perceptible to the bridal party,

"I arrest you, Mr. Beauflower, at the suit of John Tucker of Oxford, for the sum of 35*l.* 16*s.*"

Beauflower turned very pale, and was silent. The thunderbolt had at last fallen. The dreadful secret was blazoned to the world. He stood there branded and disgraced before his dearest friends. How could he fall lower? Hurled, too, from the high heaven of such happiness. That one moment he remained alone paralysed by the misery that had struck him to the earth, seemed a century. The next instant Amy was by his side, and clasping his hand, anxious and tearful, but firm to face danger or sorrow, however crushing, however insuperable it might be.

"There is no more happiness for me in this world, Amy," he said in a low voice, scarcely

daring to meet her eyes, "it was base and cowardly of me to conceal from you these troubles. You must never marry a disgraced man. Let me go to the prison that I deserve, and remain forgotten with my misery."

"Where you go I go, Ned," said Amy, pressing his hand. "It is not in your trouble that I shall leave you."

Mr. Goodrick stepped forward and took a hand of each.

"There," he said, "is the place for you," pointing to the altar where the rector of Birdbrook stood in his snowy surplice, wondering at the strange interruption, of the cause of which he was entirely ignorant. "I will satisfy this gentleman, but he must wait till a certain church service has been read, and a certain pleasant breakfast eaten, which he shall share in his own department, and if it be necessary, I and the doctor will go with Mr. Beauflower and his bride as far as the sheriff's office at Salisbury, where this trifling matter can be finally arranged in a few minutes, no doubt to the entire satisfaction of all parties."

The grim man who had not on the marriage garment, smiled, bowed, and retired to his proper distance. What could Beauflower say as Perseus smote the Pieuvre this stalwart blow, and freed him from at least one onslaught of the

monstrous nightmare of his life. His heart brimmed over, the joy condensed in his eyes into two large tears that moistened them, yet did not fall. He grasped his old friend's hand with a fervour that was more eloquent than all the speeches in the world, and with a contempt of etiquette, perhaps pardonable under the circumstances, led Amy at once to the altar, where the holy rites soon bound them together by the church's golden and consecrated chain.

The tearful pleasure of the wedding breakfast, the tremendous speech of Major Donovan, gallant, Irish, and more gallant even than Irish if that were possible, Miss Chivers' quiet delight at the whole affair, Mr. Goodrick's joy at Edward and Amy's happiness, Mrs. Beauflower's tranquil pleasure, broken in upon only by the incessant miseries of servants' neglects and mistakes, and other heinous crimes; the gross and open flirtation of Cantelupe with Miss Julia Beauflower, the whole mixed with the constant detonation of champagne corks, (Mr. Goodrick had insisted on sending dozens of silvered bottles, that did infinite credit to the Veuve Cliquot)—it is not for us to delay our story, fast hastening to its close, by describing in full detail. Suffice it to say that within a given space of time there never was much more commingled laughing and crying;

and when the postillions, blazoned with huge white rosettes, drove off the four greys—Mr. Goodrick had insisted on four greys at his own expense—and Miss Chivers hit the off wheel, already beginning to revolve, with an old satin slipper of Julia's, which Cantelupe afterwards stole and carried off openly and defiantly, the grim bailiff, who sat stiff and silent, like *atra cura post equitem*, was the only unmoved person.

O King Cupid! O Imperial Cupid! was there ever a marriage breakfast at which some fresh heart did not become a pincushion for thy rankling arrows? It was in an interval of the gaiety that night, in fact between the first waltz and the second quadrille, that Cantelupe, as happy as if there was no man in possession waiting to welcome him home, said to Julia, his partner for the next dance,

"How miserably lonely a marriage makes a fellow! I miss your brother awfully; it has left quite a—sort of—blank."

"Especially under the circumstances," said Julia, looking down at her bouquet as if searching for a concealed *billet-doux* between the flowers.

"Now that's too bad; I was wrong there. Oh, that was a mistake of mine; I feel now that I mistook the compass. I steered north when I ought to have steered south."

"What's south? which is south? the Abbey?"

"No," said Cantelupe, in a very low voice, stooping his head quite unnecessarily, and fixing his eyes on those of the lady he addressed, especially when they wavered,—"*the Vicarage.*"

"Are you good people," called out Miss Chivers mischievously at that very moment from the piano, "going to stop chattering there by the window all night? Julia, who's your *vis-à-vis.* Come, it's time we began if we're ever going to have this quadrille. Come, chicks, attend."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SALE OF THE CANTELUPE PROPERTY.

A RUMOUR had somehow got about, spread first by that delightful woman Mrs. Candour, then by her sworn friend, the equally amiable Mrs. Grundy, that there was something underhand going on about the sale of the Cantelupe property. It was a vague, shapeless rumour, invisible as malaria, originated by no one, verified by no one, but still it blew about the county like thistle-down, and dropped its seed here and there. Mr. Harker's name was not in any way mixed up with it, but there was a suspicion discussed in a whisper at farmers' ordinaries, from gig to gig at chance meetings at cross-roads, at corn markets, at sheep sales, at fairs and in harvest fields, that Messrs. Fox and Shekell, those very sharp solicitors of Bibury, were going to cheat somebody or some one, most certainly the seller and most probably the purchaser. There had been from the beginning a sort of mystery and silence about

the sale, which was to be by private contract towards the end of August. All this scandal, in Mrs. Candour's small but active mind, and Mrs. Grundy's receptive and credulous ear, had grown quick as mustard and cress from one or two small but quickly germinating seedlets. There was, in fact, something suspicious about the business from the very commencement, and every one saw it but Cantelupe, who was the most heedless and unsuspicious of mortals, and was then much more intent on a rifle competition for a cup which he had given his regiment, than on the sale, however bitter it might be to him to part from his Lares and Penates. Some said this was all to hide his real vexation and regret, but if it was, all that can be said is that the acting was very good for a beginner. It had struck every one, in the first place, that the sale had been very little advertised, even in the county papers; the Castle and grounds had not been thrown open to visitors; the family pictures had been sold, all but a few of the best, to Mr. Bassevi, and the horses had been sent up to London. Above all, and this was thought peculiarly suspicious, the sale had been postponed from the 22nd to the 27th, and people began to report that now it would not be sold at all, but another mortgage effected. Others said that this was only to throw real purchasers

off the scent, in order that just at the last moment a sale might be smuggled up with some favoured purchaser, who had, perhaps, thought a few hundreds to the sharp lawyers no bad way of obtaining a great estate (upon which the lawyers themselves could not lay their knavish fingers) many thousand pounds cheaper than it ought to go for. But the public, though indignant at injustice, bears other people's wrongs with the most Christian fortitude, so no one cared to discover the real truth of the case, and the nefarious bargain, if such existed, went on with every prospect of a completion satisfactory to the rogues concerned. In fact, as not many people have a hundred thousand pounds lying sunning at their banker's, who did or who did not buy the Cantelupe property, was not very sorely taken to heart, except by a few old friends of the family, who saw many good points about the young spendthrift, and by persons like worthy Farmer Brown, who respected the old family with almost a feudal regard, and dreaded the advent of "new money," with all its uneasy pride and miserable struggle for a place among the chilly county families who, the higher their vintage is, are only the more certain to be *bien frappé*. There were squires who had had stubborn old Saxon quarrels with the Cantelupes about some

fence, or path, or watercourse, forty years before, who were glad that the d——d proud set had gone by the board at last. There were young ladies, who would not have parted with their false hair to save all the oaks at Swallowcliff, but affected a romantic regret, and talked of Lady Blanche Cantelupe, who held out the castle for that glorious King Charles, till her men had to stew their boots and cut up the well ropes for soup. There were stubborn old radical tradesmen at Slobury and Bibury, another class who were glad there was "another of the nobs gone," and wished it was the last of them; but these were political wild cats, and relics of an almost extinct race.

The day of sale arrived at last. It was market day at Bibury, and Farmer Brown had produced in the corn market a sack of very fine new wheat, which had been tossed up, and weighed, and blown by dozens of Æolus-like mouths with smiling approval. The whole way from Summerleas, Farmer Brown and his neighbour Farmer Bletchingly, had discussed the prospects of the harvest. Along miles of sunny down, past long patch-works of gold and green, bristling stubble and dark ploughland, the great question had been fought over, and now the same question was being wrangled about, and shouted about by a hundred or so howling voices in the arcades of

Bibury corn market. The cheap Jacks and the showmen were noisy and busy as ever. The fat voluble man who "felt it always a peculiar pleasure to sell bootlaces and china ornaments in the town of Bibury," was selling china and bootlaces to his own puffers with unequalled rapidity.

In and out of the Cantelupe Arms, the thirsty farmers, and here and there a country gentleman, moved like busy, busy bees in May blossom time. The street, usually quiet as a cemetery, was full of ebbing and flowing life. The great bow window of the hotel faced the window of Messrs. Fox and Shekell, where behind the brown wire blinds four clerks were busy at abstracts of the Cantelupe titles and specifications of the property. It was about four o'clock by the old town church. The farmers were beginning to tie up their sample bags and corn sacks, and preparing for going home. The ordinary was breaking up, and Polyphemic men—broad-chested, as full and red as peonies, were calling to the ostlers for horse, gig, chaise, and cart. Young swell farmers, of the modern school, threatening with trim mustaches, or gay with exuberant azure, crimson, or green scarf of the latest fantasy, were arranging for their last game at billiards or their last glass of grog.

The man who had not taken too much was

trying to make up for lost time, and the man who had taken too much "deshidly," was trying to medicine himself by brandy and soda back into sobriety.

Still, whoever came or went, two men stood at the window of the chief hotel, watching the opposite door, and all who entered. But not to be more mysterious than necessary, we may as well at once declare that one was Mr. Fairfield, the young solicitor of Furnival's Inn, and the other, old Hill, his clerk. They had had a quiet dinner, and a modest pint of sherry, and now, fanatics at business, were reading through broad flapping sheets of particulars of the "sale of *a very valuable freehold, and tithe free castellated mansion and estate,* at Swallowcliff, in the parish of Birdbrook, in the county of Wiltshire, consisting of — acres, — roods, — perches, to take place by private contract, on Friday, the 27th of August, 1861.

"Fox & Shekell, *Solicitors,*

"Bibury."

"The property," read on the old imperturbable clerk to his master (who was checking it by a MS. of his own), "is richly-wooded, the oaks being of a great age, and lies altogether within a ring fence, with the exception of two fields; it is

situate in an excellent sporting county, abounding in game, and adjoining the preserves of Lord Mazagan, Jabez Harker, Esq., and other large landed proprietors. A small trout stream bounds the estate, and the river Winder, in which there is excellent fishing, is only half a mile distant. Swallowcliff Castle is contiguous to the parish church of Birdbrook, and about ten miles from the town of Salisbury. The whole of the estate is freehold, and tithe free, a modus of 12*s.* being paid on tithes: a yearly sum or Lord's rent of 12*s.* 2*d.* is payable for the Askerton farm, to the Duke of Downshire, as lord of the manor."

When the lawyer and his clerk had gone through the twenty conditions of sale, with now and then a shrug, or a bitter word of comment,

"By the vendor, as and for liquidated damages," said the old clerk at last, and having used these final words he paused, took snuff, and turning the particulars of sale, read over the memoranda of the agreement to be signed by the purchaser, with much unction, chuckling like an old raven over the words "——*was the highest bidder, and was declared the purchaser, subject to the above conditions of the property, comprised in the within particulars, at the price of* ——."

The words "the highest bidder," old Hill italicised in his pronunciation. Then he got up to un-

cramp himself, put his pen behind his ear, adjusted his large and broad white neckcloth, and flipped off several grains of snuff that had fallen on the collar of his black waistcoat. He next looked up the street at the church clock and compared it with his own watch.

"Five minutes to five, sir," he said to Mr. Fairfield, who was writing at a furious rate, "time."

"Take another glass of sherry, Mr. Hill; you need not collect the papers, please, we shall come back here, and we can pay the bill also when we return."

"No more sherry, Mr. Fairfield, thank you, sir. I never exceed three glasses, and I want to thoroughly enjoy this business."

"Is Tony ready in the yard?"

"Yes. He was to have his horse ready at half-past four, sharp."

"Good! then take your hat and come across. We shall surprise the rascals. Oh, we shall fall like a bomb-shell on them. They don't know the intentions of our client, I feel sure, and they are, also, I am certain, ignorant of his wealth. Come along, Hill."

The lawyer and his clerk took their hats, and, with a word to the waiter, and to Tony, who was waiting in the yard on horseback, like an ebony

statue, stepped across to Messrs. Fox and Shekell's. The two lawyers were busy in their inner room that looked out on a cheerful prospect of a very crowded churchyard, and the clerks were busy and rude. "They closed in an hour, and Messrs. Fox and Shekell could not be disturbed; they were engaged on most important business." Mr. Fairfield smiled at Mr. Hill, and Mr. Hill smiled at Fairfield.

"I suppose, then, we can't see the gentlemen, Hill, eh?" said Fairfield.

"Oh of course not, sir!" said Hill, with great inward enjoyment of the joke.

"No, sir, not to-day; call to-morrow as early as you like," said the head clerk.

"And yet," said Mr. Fairfield, "on second consideration, I think I must see them now; eh, Hill?"

"Well, I really think it would be better, sir, to see 'em to-day," said Hill, whose cough had come on rather severely, and coughing was his mode of respectfully laughing.

"Take in my card," said Fairfield, changing his tone suddenly to one far more arbitrary and commanding, "I am a London solicitor, come to ask some questions about the Cantelupe property."

"Oh, this way, sir; pray walk in; beg your pardon, sir; Mr. Fox will see you in one moment,

just concluding the sale of a large property. Will you take a seat, sir?"

"No, I must see Messrs. Fox and Shekell *directly*," said Mr. Fairfield,—"this moment." All the clerks looked round at this, for the new comer spoke loudly and sternly. "Tell them a gentleman has come to make an offer for the Cantelupe property."

The clerk looked as alarmed as if a volcano had just opened at the front window. He went into the inner room, there was much suppressed talking behind the glass-door. In a few minutes the clerk, sniggering and reassured, came out and begged Mr. Fairfield to walk in.

Mr. Fairfield and his old clerk walked calmly in.

Mr. Fox, a pale, tall, red-haired man, with a cunning, sour, pointed face; and Mr. Shekell, a short, fat, portly man, with a smiling face, and a great display of gold chain, sat at a knee-desk, which was covered with title deeds and specifications of property, but there was no visible purchaser at all. They bowed coldly to Mr. Fairfield, but did not rise.

Fairfield stated in a quiet, business-like way, that he had come to offer 75,000*l.* for the Cantelupe property.

"For yourself?" said Mr. Fox, sharply, and rather sarcastically.

"That is immaterial. I offer the money, and have the deposit ready."

"We have already been offered 70,000*l.*, and we have directions, if outbid, to offer 80,000*l.*"

"This is a singular position you are holding, gentlemen," said Mr. Fairfield, "selling the property, and yet bidding for a client of your own."

"It may be, but it is a perfectly legal one. The property will then go to our client for 80,000*l.* We close at six."

"Mr. Hill," said Fairfield, "you will observe that it still wants a quarter to six, and that we offer 85,000*l.* for this property."

"You have no chance, our client permits us to bid as high as 90,000*l.*"

"I bid 91,000*l.*, and will go higher. You observe the conditions of sale, 'the highest bidder shall be the purchaser.'"

Messrs. Fox and Shekell consulted for some time at the window. "You are not, perhaps, aware," said Mr. Fox, "that to make this a *bonâ fide* purchase you must leave a deposit of 8000*l.* If you have not this deposit ready we shall treat this purchase as a mere fanfarronade, and at once knock it down to our client, Mr. Harker, of Summerleas Abbey, for the original offer of 70,000*l.*"

"Rather cheap?"

"Yes, but suppose there is no other offer; the sale is unconditional. Mr. Cantelupe is over head and ears in debt."

"I have a cheque ready," said Mr. Fairfield, "for 7000*l.*, that's a fair deposit, and I am ready to sign the memorandum. You have, I see, the papers all ready for your client, but they are not yet signed, which is fortunate, as the sale would have been 'illegal.' Mr. Hill, be kind enough to tell me what o'clock it is."

Mr. Hill pulled out a trusty old repeater, and said "it wants twelve minutes to six."

"If the purchase money is not paid," said Mr. Shekell, spluttering with spite, "by the time the deeds are prepared and the title made good, you are perhaps aware that the property will be at once re-sold, but our client will not advance one pound over the 90,000*l.*"

"I have not come to Slobury to learn my business, Mr. Shekell," said Fairfield, with the dignity of a London practitioner, as he produced the deposit cheque. "I feel sorry to have disappointed your client, Mr. Harker. Mr. Hill, read through the memorandum prepared by these gentlemen, and see it is a perfect receipt. Such strange mistakes do take place with country solicitors."

Very glumly and sourly the discomfited

knaves received the deposit, and handed over the memorandum of receipt and an abstract of the property. Then Mr. Fairfield and old Hill, who was inwardly delighted, were coldly shown out.

Five minutes after the outer door slammed behind them, Tony rode out of the town towards Fontford, at a good, round trot. It had been Mr. Goodrick's wish that the purchaser of Swallowcliff should know as soon as possible of his success.

CHAPTER XV.

THE KEEPER'S HUT.

It was a bright afternoon in the third week of September. The happy pair, who that day week were resting in the shadows of Vallombrosa, happy as those lovers with whom Stothard delighted to people his Boccaccio gardens, had returned the night before. That same day Mr. Harker set out for Fontford, by the way of the Terraces. He wanted Mr. Robinson to repair a picture that had been scratched by some servants in cleaning.

The harvest had been early, and the stubble fields looked bare and desolate after the golden billows which had inundated the country all through burning August. "Whole as the marble, founded as the rock," was that bad man, as he strode along the Terrace, over the mossy grass, taking defiantly the very path that led to the keeper's hut, already so deeply engraved in his memory. He took a sort of Satanic pleasure in thus braving his conscience and defying his fear.

He had, indeed, no dread of the spot, now, in the broad autumn sunshine, with men ploughing only two fields off, between him and the road to Fontford, and a squirrel gambolling in a larch-tree overhead. The leaves, at that too dreadful time fresh and green, were now yellowing for their fall. The grass, reddened that June night with human blood, was now covered with fern and brambles.

It was hardly even like the wild place in the wood, shrouded with perpetual twilight, that sometimes rose before him in his dreams. Yet there was the hut, with the shadow in the doorway, just as when the murderer stepped from it, and fired the cruel shot. There it stood beside the broken wall, and near the pathway from Travers's now grown over with grass and seldom trodden by the keepers, who shunned the place, declaring that it was haunted.

To himself, Harker, as he passed the place, defended the murder. "Murder," he said, "was self-defence. The man was trying to kill me by bothering me with threats, and by contempt. He would have preyed on me till one of us died. He would have disgraced me before my wife and children, proved me a criminal, and sent me to die in the prison-yard, or at an Australian farm, if I had ever stood at bay and defied him. He had got secrets about old Staunton's will. It was a

case almost exactly similar to that of poor Professor Webster, whom he had always pitied. That wise and good man, driven to despair by the persecutions of a remorseless, pitiless debtor, took the opportunity at last to kill him in secret. No, he (Harker) did not repent, and were another Travers to arise, which was of course impossible, he would again, he felt, seek some subtle and infallibly safe way of removing the wretch, whose death alone could bring him peace."

Heaven had not condemned the act. Earth had kept inviolably secret the name of the slayer of Travers. It was buried in the fathomless darkness for ever. The only man who ever knew about the will of old Mr. Staunton was dead; the doctor to whom he had confided it also lay dead far away in some unknown corner of France. The scoundrel who had discovered the secret, and traded on it, had been removed by force, and lay silent under the earth of Summerleas churchyard. All went well, and he to whom not even a blade of grass on the Abbey estate belonged, still held in his inexorable grasp all the broad acres and the great wealth that really belonged to some distant descendant of Staunton, however remote he might be, however obscure.

Harker's iron will had triumphed, the heart of stone rejoiced in the power that the promp-

titude at fraud, and the daring stroke of murder, had given him, and retained in his hand. He believed in no Deity, or he would have mocked at his inertness, and denied his power over man. Then the murderer's dark, tortuous mind travelled back to early days, and the first seeds he had sown of future plots, seeds which had grown up with such rapidity, and borne such fruit.

A deep groan from the underwood which he was skirting startled him from these reveries. Without a fear he eagerly pushed aside the bushes to see who had uttered it, and for a moment a thought of the dying keeper passed through his scared mind. There, in a small cleared space amongst the hazel bushes, at the foot of a beech tree, the grass round him blackened by fire, lay, on his back, a sleeping beggar, in a muddy, torn, scarlet coat and a bruised black velvet hunting-cap. His bare feet were bleeding where they had been torn by the brambles; a broken, dirty pipe lay by one of his relaxed hands, the sparks from it had burnt the grass for several feet round the tree, and had scorched the vagabond's coat. It was poor Paddy Blake, who since his disgrace had in despair sunk into utter sottishness.

Mr. Harker had no mercy for the pitiable wretchedness of the poor Pariah. He thrust the ferrule of his heavy pointed stick into the man's

chest to wake him, and even this failing, he rolled him roughly with his foot.

"I won't have you about my place," he said; "so pack off. I want no lazy, poaching, suspicious fellows about my estate. Be off, or I'll set the police on you."

The man leaped up, still half asleep; his eyes were wild with terror and incipient delirium. "I know you," he said. "Yah! you're the son of old Staunton's steward, who got all this land so luckily. You pity no one, and it was you who set my master upon me about that horse. That drove me almost mad. I have been nearly mad ever since, for he'd been kind to me, and I was faithful to him. It was you, too, set going that I killed the keeper. You wicked blackguard, you trod on me wantonly, as you would on a beetle, and I owe you for it. There is a God above us still, remember that. Some day it may be your turn to be driven about like a mad dog, and then I'll be there to pelt you. You beast, I should like to bite your windpipe in two. *I hate you.*"

As Paddy poured out these half-insane denunciations, and even laid his hand on Harker, that gentleman thrust him from him, and hurled the half-starved delirious wretch staggering into the bushes, then shaking his heavy pimento stick, he said, savagely—

"You lay your loathsome hand on me again, you lying thief, and I will split your skull with one blow of this stick. The police will be after you, my man, before one hour is over. Remember you've threatened my life; and even if you get away this time, whenever I see you next, I'll have you dragged to gaol, or beaten by my keepers. You'll defy me, will you?"

"The rascal had all the inclination to murder about him; but he isn't stronger than a child," said Harker to himself, as Paddy, frightened, but threatening, skulked limping off through the bushes like a wounded weasel.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TWO MINIATURES.

THE week after the return of the "happy pair" from the vineyards and olive gardens of Italy had been expected by Mr. Goodrick, who did not know the exact day that Beauflower would come back, the virtuoso sent for Mr. Robinson to his new house, on business.

It was about restoring one or two Dutch pictures, that had been injured by the sun, and more especially about the restoration of a part of the background of a most precious miniature which Mr. Goodrick valued so much that he would not allow it to be left at the Lawsons', or even to be painted on, out of his sight.

Exactly at eleven, or a few minutes after, just as Dr. Briscoe had driven up to "Heart's Delight," as the eccentric virtuoso had called his house, for a few minutes' chat, old Robinson came slowly up the lane out of Fontford, carrying his square black tin paint-box in one hand, and his brushes

wrapped up in newspaper, in the other; his face was radiant with smiles, and he walked fast, enjoying all he heard and saw. It was not often the worthy old technicalist allowed himself a morning's holiday, and he profoundly enjoyed it. But what was the crowning delight of the day was that George had just come over with letters from the post, and brought the joyful news that the Vicar and Amy had returned late the night before, and would be with him at a little before one. He therefore intended to paint steadily for two hours on the miniature, then strike work and return to an early dinner with the family, who, he had left word, were to come for him to "Heart's Delight."

Goodrick's house, originally a damp, neglected, unused place (long ago occupied by Mr. Harker's father, when he was a humble bailiff to the Stauntons), had now grown into a pretty and tasteful cottage, with a large Tudor window on either side the porch, the design of which had been cleverly copied from the old Jacobite ruin. The old overgrown shrubs cut down and civilised by the gardener's stern steel, and replanted in proper order (especially in one great clump facing the porch), were growing luxuriantly, and rows of larches, skirting the road, sheltered the house from the fields, and gave it a cozy old-

established look. The gravel walks were neat, and the flower borders trim; some rare creepers with blue flowers, like outspread butterflies, clustered round the stone mullions of one window, while high over the other, and all round the long upper bed-room lattices, a Virginia creeper spread its green and crimson leaves in hectic beauty that seemed to defy death. The gleam of scarlet against the grey stone wall charmed the artist, who instantly began to think whether the *impasto* to represent the stone, shouldn't be scraped with a knife, and then glazed with some sunshine colour, in slant patches, just as the sunshine rested there then.

Leo, majestically arousing like the friendly lion in an allegory, ushered the pilgrim to the interpreter's house, where through the open lattice pleasant voices and pleasant faces greeted him. Tony opened the door, smiling.

"Welcome, Apelles of Fontford," said Mr. Goodrick, meeting him at the front door, and shaking hands, "come and argue with this heretic in here, who refuses to see any beauty in Van Huysum's flowers." He threw open the door of a room deliciously walled with books. Dr. Briscoe was sitting there before a large Dutch flower picture, of which, as he loudly declared, he could make nothing. On a marble plinth the

painter had rested a vase, adorned with a bas-relief representing the childhood of Bacchus, and in this vase was a gorgeous bouquet of yellow roses, hyacinths, tulips, auriculas, primroses, crown imperials, and poppies, while by the side of the vase lay a bird's nest with eggs, some rose buds, and a trailing bunch of honeysuckle.

The artist touched the canvas with a wet finger, and got his eye quite close to it.

"Very fine," he said, "very solid. Oil of copaiba; first painted in black, and ultramarine, and white, and glazed for the colour. Van Huysum has been using Venice turpentine and wax here. Very fine, but I like Ruysch and Van Aalst at their best moments quite as well. That flower to the left is slightly faded."

"Exactly, my dear sir," said the owner, "that's precisely where your great technical knowledge will come in usefully to fight with time."

"Well, you may say what you like, and you may talk all day," said the obstinate doctor, behind the Torres Vedras lines of his own Saxon doggedness, "but I say a man's a fool to try to paint flowers. For my own part I'd rather have a dandelion with the sunshine on it, or a bough of dog-roses with the June dew dripping from them, than all Van Os or Van anybody else ever painted. The transparency, the fragrance, the surrounding

of the flowers is wanting in these matter-of-fact pictures; and for mere ornament, I'd a thousand times sooner have one of old Hunt's primroses or boughs of pink and white apple blossoms. There was some poetry about old Hunt, but these Dutchmen, pshaw!"

"That comes of giving two thousand francs for this Van Huysum at the Hague. Ah! there is no pleasing you amateurs. Now then, Mr. Robinson, for the miniature."

Mr. Robinson had already taken an easel from the well-known corner of the library, and placed it with professional alertness in a good light near the window. Then he unlocked his square black tin box with a little key that hung on his long old-fashioned watch chain, lastly, he set his palette and unrolled his brushes.

"I've not yet, Mr. Goodrick," he said, "found out that kind patron of mine, and Mr. Thorndyke will not tell me his name. Oh, what a head I've got, why I've actually forgotten to tell you what I came so full of, it's that Van Huysum put it out of my head!"

Here the enthusiastic old child squeezed out a little coiling worm of flake white between the yellow and the crimson, and stood up exulting.

"What do you think?—I know you will be glad to hear it. Amy and her husband have

returned, and are coming for me here, in order to see you, at one. It is very foolish I know, but I almost feel inclined to dance and sing."

"I am as glad," said Goodrick, "as if it was my own daughter. I love Amy; in fact, I have done so almost ever since I first saw her, yes as a daughter, and my good young friend Beauflower, —there's a heart of gold for you—is as clever as he is good."

"That he is," said the doctor; "and as for Amy, there's no doubt at all about it that she's a fairy changeling, but then we all like the changeling in fairy stories."

"You cannot praise her too much," said Mr. Robinson, turning up his cuffs and filling the little tin panniers on his palette with oil and turpentine. "I can assure you two gentlemen, both being friends of mine, that Amy never gave me or her mother a moment's trouble in her life. She was always a sunshiny, charming temper, that had in it few of women's usual April gusts."

"And what I specially admire in her," said Dr. Briscoe, "is that she is so unconscious of her perfection, or even of having a temper so sweet and unvariable.

"She does deserve to be loved," said Mr. Goodrick, "and I never see her but I think of my young days, when I had dreams of winning just such a

little paragon, but ah! those dreams, doctor, how soon fresh dreams come sprouting from their shoulders, and so they pass."

"Well, they do," said the doctor, shaking his old grizzly head at the Van Huysom. "I once thought I should make my fortune here, and a pretty fortune I've found it. Swift or somebody, wasn't it, said of marriage, 'that we were like birds in cages, those who were out wanted to get in, and those who were in wanted to get out.' I begin to think I'd better have tried the lottery for a wife thirty years ago."

"Bag of eels and snakes; but of course you may yet pull out an eel," said Mr. Goodrick, relapsing into bitterness. "Nice women we get for wives now, female doctors and female electors, and young ladies who, instead of needing help, look as if they would knock you down if you even dared to offer them your arm. Ugh! There are no women now, only female men. Amy, your wife, Robinson, Miss Chivers, and Mr. Beauflower's sister, are the only women I know. Are you all ready, Robinson, for the miniature? Are you quite comfortable as to light and so on? the room is entirely at your disposal."

"My palette is set, and I am quite ready for work," said Mr. Robinson.

"I am going, for I've got another case of fever

at Stoat's Nest," said Dr. Briscoe, "but not being without curiosity, I shall just stay and see this incomparable miniature you so treasure."

"You will then see the portrait of one very dear to me, Briscoe," said Mr. Goodrick, "it is the romance of my life. If she had lived, I should not have been the poor, lonely, cynical old fellow you now have before you."

As he said this he rose, went to a large ivory and ebony cabinet that stood on a buhl table by the window, unlocked it with a silver key from his pocket, then with a smaller key unlocked a secret drawer, concealed by japanned doors. He drew out the case, opened it silently with religious care, and kissed it three times.

"I dare say you think me a romantic old fool, doctor," he said, "but this has been my ideal, and I have never found anything to replace it."

The doctor took the case from him, while Robinson wiped his palette knife, and took a small mahlstick that screwed together in three joints, from a compartment of his paint-box. The doctor held the golden-bound oval miniature to several lights, then satisfying himself with one at last, pondered over it in surprise and ecstasy.

"What, do you mean to say, Goodrick," he exclaimed, as he looked at the miniature through a tube formed by his left hand, "do you mean to

tell me you don't see the resemblance? what, don't you see some one it is like? only the hair is fairer here, and the eyes of a different colour. Why, it is surprising!"

"Of course I do," said Mr. Goodrick, who was looking for something in a portfolio of Dutch etchings, "and that's, I think, why I love the young lady you mean so much."

Then he came up and looked over the doctor's shoulder.

"It is wonderfully like. I thought so ever since the first day I saw Amy doing something to some flowers at a window opposite mine. It is not the features merely you see either, for the hair and the eyes differ. I don't think nature ever quite repeated that face, but kept the colour and expression for the angels; but there is the turn of her neck, and the smile is wonderfully like. The Dutchman who painted that in Paris was the best miniature painter, I think, who ever lived. For myself, I far preferred him to either Hilliard, Isaac, or Peter Oliver, for exquisite finish and grace. Poor fellow, he died of drinking absinthe, and yet I respect his memory, for it is to him I owe this beautiful shadow of her who once illumined my life."

"Dutchman?" said Mr. Robinson, screwing on the third joint of his mahlstick. "Well that's

singular, for the best miniature painter I ever knew was also a Dutchman—Van Holst. I have a fine bit of his still by me."

"Van Holst! Well, that is a coincidence, for that was the very name of the man who painted my miniature."

"It was?" said Mr. Robinson, rising from his easel. "Well, I didn't think there was a man in England had any of Van Holst's works but myself; let's see this wonderful miniature."

Mr. Robinson sat down in a square, green, velvet-backed Moliere chair by the window, to assume a proper critical attitude, and then, taking the miniature that Mr. Goodrick handed him, put on his heavy silver spectacles to examine it. To the surprise of the two friends, who watched him, his countenance, instead of expressing delight at the technical excellence of the miniature, was moved by a surprise that was so sudden and excessive that it amounted almost to terror. He held the portrait first close to his eyes, then at a distance, opened and shut his eyes, and stared round the room as if to assure himself that he was not in a dream.

"Why, what is the matter?" said Mr. Goodrick, whose curiosity was roused to the uttermost, "you seem to recognise Van Holst's work."

"Recognise it," said Mr. Robinson, rushing to

his paint-box, and unlocking a lower tray where he kept one or two unfinished sketches, and several rarities, including a Palladium of his, a small replica of the Gevartiu's, "recognise it! I think my brain is going. Recognise it, Mr. Goodrick, why look here!"

He opened a square, flat, red box, wrapped up in soft silver paper, and drew out an unfinished miniature on ivory. It was a facsimile of Mr. Goodrick's miniature — hair, eyes, turn of the head, fashion of the dress, necklace, everything, except that in the left corner of the background, Van Holst had signed his name, with the date 1821. The background was also slightly deeper in tone.

Mr. Goodrick now in his turn seemed struck with sudden delirium. He seized the two miniatures, held them side by side, and conned every touch with the eager curiosity and comparison of an expert.

"No," he said, "it is not a copy, no one could have a copy, it has never been from under my lock and key for forty years. There are no miracles now. How was this? You knew Van Holst?"

"I knew him in London, in the year I married, 1835. I showed him this miniature, and he remembered painting it in Paris in 1821."

"In 1821. Impossible! Did he mention—did he mention the name of the lady he painted?"

"Yes he did, but I knew it before."

"You knew it. Good God! how could you know it?"

"She was my wife's half-sister."

"Her name?"

"Lucy Staunton."

Mr. Goodrick turned pale, as if his heart had for a moment ceased to beat, his lips turned livid, and he sank on a chair beside the artist, who also appeared strangely perturbed, and kept staring at the two miniatures as if his own picture had become miraculously doubled. Dr. Briscoe also appeared strangely roused by the utterance of this old name, and coming to Mr. Goodrick, asked if he should ring for Tony to bring a glass of wine; for he was, as he felt by his pulse, suffering from some great nervous shock.

But Mr. Goodrick gave the doctor no answer, his eyes were fixed on the miniature, and the miniature alone; everything else, earth, sea, or air, seemed to him now indifferent.

"I may tell you now," he said, "Mr. Robinson, as a friend of Mr. Staunton, the husband of the lady the facsimile of whose portrait you possess, that when I returned to England from the West Indies, to fulfil some last wishes of my poor dead friend, I discovered, through the medium of Mr. Fairfield, my solicitor, and Mr. Thorndyke, an

agent of mine, in the purchase of jewels, pictures, and curiosities, that a relative, a half-sister of my friend's wife, was still living, and having married an artist, lived in Buckingham Street, Strand. Thorndyke found me out your address, and I took chambers opposite you, in the autumn of the last year. At the window of those chambers I first saw Amy, and recognised the likeness to this miniature left me by Staunton as his dearest idol."

Dr. Briscoe listened to every word with the deepest attention, and his character of secret-keeper to a large part of Wiltshire showed more and more in his brow and eyes.

Mr. Robinson had listened to this strange statement with his head resting upon his hand, and his elbows supported on the table; he did not raise his head when Mr. Goodrick concluded.

"There is a little confession I have to make," said the old artist, with a tremulous voice; "and yet I feel I must make it to so old a friend of Mr. Staunton's; though it is very bitter to tell one's own shame, and expose a lie of twenty years. It has long lain heavy on my heart; I had resolved to tell Amy the day of her marriage; but I had not courage when all that happened, and they still loved each other. It was so hard to untwine her

arms from my neck, and tell her I was not her father."

"You not her father! Who was then?" said Mr. Goodrick, almost fiercely, as he started up and confronted the broken man who made the confession, "and who was her mother? Tell me, for God's sake, tell me!"

"Her father was a Captain Laroche."

"And her mother?"

"Her mother was the daughter of the wife of your friend."

"That is false, man, she had no children."

"Yes, she had one daughter, in giving birth to whom she died. She——"

But Mr. Goodrick had fallen back in his chair and fainted.

Dr. Briscoe rang violently for water and for brandy.

Slowly, very slowly, the old man recovered, and a faint light returned into his eyes.

"It is useless for me," he said, "to keep on any longer the iron mask I have worn for so many years. Do you wonder why the disclosure you have made rends my very heart, and made the blood ebb from it as if it never would return? I will tell you. I am weary of my disguise, and God in heaven be thanked, it would be sinful any longer to wear it. I, too, have a secret to tell

that will astonish both of you, my friends. I am not Goodrick—I am Herbert Staunton, the drowned man. I am the son cast off by Herbert Staunton, after his imprudent marriage with Lucy Wilson, the daughter of a poor Devonshire clergyman, who came to stop here to do temporary duty for Beauflower's father. It is my once friend, that accursed villain, that cruel treacherous villain, Harker, the son of my father's steward, who suppressed my letters to my father, and his to me, till we became for ever alienated. He suppressed, too—may he die in poverty and despair!—he must have suppressed her letters to me, and mine to her. She died—she for whom I would have sold my blood, to spare one pang—she died believing that I had deserted her."

The old man's heart overflowed at this bitter thought, and he burst into irresistible and passionate tears.

"I see it all," said the doctor, as he sat down and buried his head in his hands.

"Then you are Amy's grandfather?" said Mr. Robinson.

"I am her grandfather. Where is she, that I may clasp to my heart that image of her I once loved?"

"Harker did not conceal the fact of Lucy's birth from you," said Mr. Robinson. "He knew

only of her mother's death; the fact of the birth of a child was concealed from him by those kind Devonshire friends who tended poor Lucy in her last illness. They were indignant at your supposed neglect, for Harker stinted her even of the money which you, no doubt, supplied."

"Stinted! I sent money many, many times."

"Indignant with you, they resolved to adopt the child, and not to disclose to you her birth till she was grown up, or till you showed some signs of contrition for the treatment of her poor mother."

"Gracious God! and this man has not been struck by lightning! Oh! that I could strip this wretch, leaf by leaf, till I left him a mere log of dead wood to be thrown into hell's furnace. My hate is so great, so bitter, so malignant that I could kill him now bit by bit, or watch him broken on the wheel. Oh! that I could leave Amy, my granddaughter, these broad lands, and all the wealth this fawning wretch won by his trickery and lies. I would not kill him, God and man have forbidden that; but I would cast him out to disease and to beggary. Yes, both he and his. Oh! that Heaven would grant me some revenge to offer on that dear grave! Where was it they buried her? Oh Lucy!"

Mr. Robinson's countenance sunk, as he slowly

replied, not daring even to meet the eye of his questioner. "In the Fosse Commune of Père la Chaise. Lucy died suddenly in the temporary absence of her friends at Havre, and they found her, to their horror, buried when they returned. They never could discover her grave."

"Buried like a dog! She, my angel, for whom I would have given up wealth, ambition, everything. Heaven must have some revenge in store for these crimes."

"Yes, and it sends it now," said Dr. Briscoe, drawing a packet of discoloured letters from his breast pocket. "There," said he, "for the last twelve years I have carried these letters, left in my charge by Dr. Chevalier, my predecessor, the doctor who attended on your father."

"And they contain?"

"They contain a proof that your father's will, leaving everything to that thief Harker, was left unsigned, and that the signatures attached to it were forgeries."

"Forgeries? Forgeries? Then my father did not disinherit me?"

"Compose yourself; sip that brandy. I insist on it. You are turning pale again."

"No, it is for joy, for joy this time. No, I shall not faint now. Amy is my Lucy restored from the grave. This happiness even death cannot deprive

me of. I defy death and time. Yes, I am strong now—I am strong now."

"Your father kept his will unsigned, hoping against hope, that some child of yours, of you, his drowned son, might appear, and to him or his he might leave the property. He still to my predecessor often spoke of you with regret, pardon, and tenderness."

"Bless him for that."

"Latterly, we learn from Harker's accomplice, the father of Travers, the keeper who was murdered, that Harker kept the old man in a constant stupor with laudanum, lest before visitors he might suddenly resolve to make and sign a fresh will."

"Villain! Execrable double-dyed villain! Gracious Heaven be thanked that it is all mine for Amy. I should die happy now, if I died at the sight of her, for I should awake at Heaven's gate beside Lucy—Lucy whom I love."

These passionate words were hardly uttered before the library door was thrown wide open, and Tony announced with a practised formality,—

"Mr. Jabez Harker!"

"You were so busy talking," he said, "you three people, as I passed by the window, that you actually neither saw me nor heard me. You were

all deaf as adders. I've come, Mr. Goodrick, to see those Twelve Countesses of Peter Lombart that you wanted me so to see, and compare with my Vandycks. I want specially to see the 'Ann Carr.' Leslie tells me it is very fine. Well, you were talking away not to hear or see me. Ha, ha! deaf as adders; but, Good Gracious! what's the matter with you all?"

"Adders!" said Mr. Goodrick, with teeth scarcely parted. "Adders! well said; and the last one brimming with poison."

"Are you all mad? Why do you stare at me so?"

"I will tell you why we stare at you," said Dr. Briscoe; "we stare to see a man who could betray his friend and deceive his benefactor; who could let a son die, struck down by his father's anger, and a father die ignorant of his son's repentance and his love. We stare also to see the rich man who, in another minute, will leave this room branded for ever as a forger, and stripped, beggared, and disgraced."

"Take care what you say, doctor. Oh, you are mad, must be mad! Who is to do all this? Who says the will was not a valid one? I shall have the law against you, Briscoe. This is a conspiracy."

"This confession of Joseph Travers, lately de-

ceased, butler to old Mr. Staunton. He gave with his own hands this paper, in my presence, to Dr. Chevalier."

"Pshaw! a lie of some low attorney's contriving; some such man as the one into whose hands the Cantelupe property has just fallen. And who are the claimants of my land and of the Abbey, pray, Dr. Briscoe? Mr. Robinson, I suppose, or your worthy self."

Harker's heart had for the moment turned cold, but he had, by a strong effort, recovered his courage.

"You want to see him, Mr. Harker," said Goodrick; "you shall be gratified, thou incarnation of all evil. Look at me. Did you ever know one Herbert Staunton with whom you went to school at Marlborough, and who was your bosom friend and ally, till he ran away from here with Lucy Wilson, whose child—"

"Child?"

"Yes, you may well start; a child of whom you are unacquainted—"

"I did know a man of that name," said Harker, "but he was drowned forty years ago."

"I AM HE!"

"Oh, of course you are; I expected that; ah! I saw that was coming. So, you really think, you

old impostor, that I'm actually going to be stripped by such a bare-faced led-up-to trick as this. There is no Herbert Staunton, and no daughter; his wife died without children six months after their marriage. The will is beyond suspicion. My lawyers will see to this; it is really a pity you three should waste your money in this foolish and impudent plot. Gentlemen conspirators, I wish you respectfully a very good morning."

("They've got the papers, I see, d— them," thought Harker, "but I can fight them; as for this claimant, he's a cheat, some West Indian who knew Staunton, and learned from him certain useful facts, which he now wishes to turn into cash. Ha! they don't know me.")

"Jabez Harker," said Goodrick, with the voice of a judge of the dead, "I don't want to repeat the legal proofs of my own existence; those will come out soon enough for you. I don't want either to revile you for the Satanic cruelty of your mode of severing the ties that held Lucy to me and me to my father; that you will answer here, and not only here but hereafter. The recording angel has a long memory; but I want, instead of killing you at my feet, which I might have done years ago, to show you before these two friends of mine, a proof which will send the truthful colour to even your brazen forehead;

you may remember now, fifty-four years ago, that one holiday at Marlborough in the cricket field—Observe his face, gentlemen!"

"Just one moment, please," said Dr. Briscoe, with his back to the door at which Harker darted.

"One day in the cricket field, just when a third game was over, we got needles and gunpowder, and imitating an old man of war's man whom we had seen begging the day before, we two, as sworn changeless friends, determined to prick on each of our left arms, just above the wrists, a true lovers' knot, and a heart with cross arrows in it. There is yours," — in an instant, Dr. Briscoe, at a nod, seized Mr. Harker's hand, and before he could release himself, stripped up the shirt cuff and showed it,—" and here is mine."

As he said this, Mr. Goodrick bared his left wrist, and showed a little above it, tattooed in faint blue lines, a true lovers' knot and a heart transfixed with arrows. "You see," he said, "the man cannot speak. I came down here, Harker, not knowing then of this forgery, not thinking of the lost estate, but only to watch the unjust steward, and see whether real happiness had come with such base earned wealth. You are now, perhaps, convinced that I *am* Herbert Staunton, and that the report that reached my father and you of my death by

drowning off the Pearl Islands, was only a report invented and circulated by me after my wife had died and my father had thrown me off. After that, with the little money I had left, I went and bought a sugar plantation in Cuba; there, as men often do when they are careless of life or fortune, I survived many stronger men and grew rich. You are no longer sceptical, you recognise in me now, sir, the injured man who was your friend."

"Recognise you?" said Harker, with a look of the most devilish hatred and contempt, "I recognise you only as a fellow who has caught some small points of identity, which any cheat might do. My lawyers will soon tell you how far I know you." Then he strode out, slamming the door behind him as if a whirlwind had borne him to "his own place."

"So we exorcised the devil," said Dr. Briscoe, laughing, as the hoofs of the horse which Harker had fastened at the gate, were heard echoing down the lane towards Fontford. Some quarter of an hour afterwards, as the three men were busily reading the statement of the old butler, Travers's father, laughing young voices were heard outside the shrubbery, and the next moment Amy and the Vicar ran to the window, and looked in, bowing and smiling welcomes. Mrs.

Robinson and Miss Chivers followed them close behind. Amy had never looked so beautiful and radiant. She seemed to move encircled by a saintly aureole of pure and serene happiness.

But no one greeted Amy or the Vicar when they entered, beaming with love and happiness, and rejoicing at the sight of faces so dear and so friendly. Old Robinson did not even rise from his chair when Amy flew to him and kissed him, and casting herself on her knees, seized his thin, pallid hands.

"My dear," he said to his wife, "I have told all. Amy, we have deceived you ever since you came to our care; Amy, you are not our child."

"You are not my father! Oh, Edward, what does this mean? what can it mean?"

"It means, Amy," said Dr. Briscoe, advancing and taking Amy's hand, and helping her to rise, "it means that your grandfather Herbert Staunton has risen from the dead, that he and Mr. Goodrick are one, and that you are the daughter of his child."

"My child!" sobbed the expectant father, and her eyes met his, which shone with a profound joy and peace.

"My father!" cried Amy, and as she flew into his outstretched arms, tears of joy burst from her

eyes. "Not my father," she said, "but my dear grandfather." Then he released her for a moment, and she ran and took the hands of Mr. and Mrs. Robinson, "You must still let me, grandpapa, love those who have loved me so dearly; and Ned, you will love us all, won't you? I know your heart is large enough for that, dearest."

CHAPTER XVII.

PADDY BLAKE'S LAST RIDE.

Poor hounded vagabond; known to be a poacher; suspected of drugging Immenschikoff; by many regarded as having had some knowledge at least of the keeper's murder; warned off here, "chivied" there, treated coldly even by his old boon companions at the "Harker's Arms," the "Peal of Bells," and other old haunts of his; poor Paddy had found no consolation in his troubles but sleep, no friend but his old treacherous enemy, drink. The few halfpence he begged or borrowed from stray grooms, or tipsy men at beer-shop doors, enabled him to hurry himself rather faster than usual to the long threatening *delirium tremens.* Into that vortex of suicidal madness Paddy was now hurrying blindfold, and with incredible speed. It needed no intellectual demon from the region of flames to allure poor Paddy down the primrose path, or over the rose-hidden edge of Death's black precipices,

with a mind naturally weak, unbalanced, and without the power of resisting impulses; with no safety-valve of prudence, no break of reflection; his brain, moreover, sodden with liquid madness, his heart half broken by sorrow at being thought unfaithful to his benefactor, Paddy was as ready, at the word of the foul fiend that kept steady at his crooked elbow, to run a muck, as any Malay madman, fresh from a three days' debauch on Indian hemp. Despair, indifference for life, and a wild notion of dying at once and in some strange way that might not only be an assertion of his innocence about the horse, but a vexation to Squire Harker, was seething in his fevered mind, as, the night after Harker had seen him, he once again ventured into the Abbey Woods, and staggered and forced a way through the thickest underwood, in a part least frequented. He had eaten nothing now for two days, but he had spent in gin and beer a shilling or two some grooms at Lord Mazagan's had collected for him in the stable.

The poor rogue's mind was in that state now of chronic excitement, that he could not distinguish his imaginations from realities; once, when a white owl screamed close to the hut where Travers was murdered, he thought he saw it fly between the firs with its wings on fire. Then

he half resolved to go and hang himself on a certain horizontal branch of an elm, that he remembered thinking, some months before, was a good place for a man who wanted to do away with himself. Then an uncontrollable fear seized him, and he ran along the terraces with the frantic speed of a madman, fancying at every surging "sough" of the wind among the trees, that a pack of hell-hounds had been set on him, and would tear him to pieces if they once overtook him. He could not see them, but he saw, as he believed, their flaming eyes racing past among the bushes, and once he threw himself into a weedy pond, and stood breast high in the water, praying to be saved from their fangs. At last, worn out with fear, frenzy, and fatigue, he threw himself down under a tall juniper bush, not far from the keeper's hut, and slept for several hours in its ominous shadow. It was scarcely dark when he went to sleep, and a deep dull red light was in the west; when he awoke it was after midnight, and the full moon was just rising over the distant woods of Swallowcliff. It was the voices of some passing keepers that had aroused him. They were passing close to the bush where he lurked, and were talking of some one in London having bought all the Cantelupe estates.

"Every stick," said one.

"It was that last siller that he dropped at the races that knocked him over," said the other.

"Yes! ah! that blackguard Paddy doubled on him. Curse him, I lost two pounds over that infernal horse."

Paddy cowered silently till they had gone by on their rounds—the Scotch head-keeper and his man—then he slunk out into the moonlight, that covered the terrace with cloth of fairy silver; those words had been like fire coals to explode the powder mine of his madness—he who would have cut off his arms to serve Mr. Cantelupe, and his legs to have insured victory to the horse. He was stark howling mad now, and his thoughts were resolutely bent on instant and expiatory death.

Bursting through the bushes, and racing with the speed of light down the great slope of the Abbey terraces, falling once or twice over bushes, and lacerating his bare feet with the brambles, till they left red prints on the grass they crushed, he rushed towards Mr. Harker's outlying stables, the very spot where, months before, he had fought the Yorkshire groom, and had, unfortunately for himself, threatened Travers. It was a long raw looking brick building two stories high,

and the shining windows were staring vacantly at the moon.

The grooms, taking advantage of Mr. Dawson's absence in London, had gone out contrary to rules, to attend a club feast at Slobury. The helpers and boys—everyone—were away, and there was no sound inside the locked-up doors, but the shivering of the horses, an occasional neigh or whinny, and the drag of the weighted manger chains.

Paddy thundered at the door, shouting to the grooms by name to let him have Immenschikoff out, then he would ride and win on him. Presently he dragged and wrenched at the door handle, and then tried to force the window. Still no reply, but the uneasy drag of the chains and the sound of the horses' feet, as the hunters moved in the stalls.

"Let him out," he cried, "or I'll burn the place," and he rummaged his rags to try and find a match, and thrust it under the door into the litter of loose straw. The horses began to kick and neigh as he broke in a window with his fist, and tried to wrench out one of the long narrow iron bars that guarded it. Foiled in both these efforts, and hearing the hell-hounds now, as he thought, gathering above on the terrace for a rush upon him, Paddy climbed the wall of the

paddock on one side of the stable, and there in one corner, half hidden in straw, found the limb of an elm, that had been used to prop a hay-stack which had leaned on one side. With this, in an instant, he drove in a small double door leading into the stable, and used for the removal of litter and rubbish. Once in, with a yell of triumph, and dragging in the battering-ram with him, he soon beat down the wood work round the back of the stable door; then with a bill-hook he found in the harness-room, where it had been used to split firewood, clove down and split the rest, and wrenched off the bolts and frame-work. The restless horses, kicking and plunging, he then released by climbing like a cat round the mangers and hay-racks; and with his knife cutting the halters turned them one by one adrift, shouting at them as he drove them madly away, with their heads turned towards Swallowcliff and the brook where Amy so nearly perished. As every horse passed him at the door, Paddy slapped him on the flank, and gave a mad frantic scream of delight.

The vicious chestnut mare, Firefly, was the only one now left, and her halter Paddy had not cut effectually. She was still in her stall, straining at the chain, her eyes wild, red with terror, a dew of fear clammy upon her coat.

Paddy, wildly clambering about the manger, stopped to admire the beautiful vixen. At that instant the madman's eyes, turning to the doorway, saw those phosphorescent glimmers of the retina which to the crazed creature seemed the eyes of hell-hounds that had slunk down from the wood, and were now waiting in ambush for their victim. Not a moment to be lost. With a yell of delight he threw himself on the mare's back, cut her halter, and stooping to her mane, which he clutched with the grasp of madness, drove her through the doorway to follow the wild hunt already storming over the meadows below the Abbey coverts.

With the seat of a Comanchee Indian—knees like vices, feet locked under the mare's belly, hands entangled in the black mane—the madman, like the ghost of a dead fox-hunter, urged the mare by cries and howls over the moonlit meadows, across which in the distance the train of flying horses could be seen in a dark wavering line, as they undulated over rails and hedges. Once only, as the mare topped a double rail, Paddy let go his hold of her mane with one hand, waved his battered hunting-cap, and gave a view halloo. Then the wild hunt swept on, pursued by the demon dogs, the flame-breathing, maddening tormentors of his own imagination,

Away Firefly and her rider tore, over ploughland and fallow, through covert and copse, over pasture, park, and stubble. The mare, too, now seemed to have also gone mad, and flew through the air like a demon horse, white foam churning in her mouth, hot vapour rising from her bloodshot nostrils.

The string of half-tipsy grooms, laughing and shouting as they rambled home from Slobury, stopping on a hill to light their pipes and empty a soda-water bottle full of gin they had brought with them for fear of provisions falling short by the way, and looking across the valley towards Swallowcliff, saw, to their horror and amazement, a man madly riding towards the dangerous brook, chasing before him six or seven other riderless horses. All but one cleared the brook, and that one turned and dashed across the country towards Fontford. The rider drove his horse at the brook exactly at the spot where an oak spread its boughs across. They saw him swept from the horse's back, and disappear in the water. The horse, however, flew on, with a black dog or a fox, they could not tell which, close before it.

The grooms, half-sobered by this strange sight, hurried down together fast to the brook. They could see nothing but a dark sop in a shadow under the tree. The most sober of them, at once

diving, drew to the surface the dead body of Paddy Blake. The blow of the horizontal oak bough had fractured his skull in the most horrible way, and he must have fallen stone dead into the water.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE UNEXPECTED VISITORS.

Mr. Goodrick's tipsy laundress, and her no less bibulous husband, were having a final glass at the "Apple Tree," hob-nobbing at the bar with the barmaid and potman, who had strong opinions as to the desirability of the proposed embankment.

"A little bit of lemon, miss, just for flavouring," said Mrs. Harvey to the barmaid, who was very elegant in her management of the hot water, and in peeling lemons, and extracting queen cakes from the gold-fish globes, and was supposed to be not unlikely to marry the gentleman that kept the fishmonger's shop at the top of the street, "and then David and I must go and lock up; for our second floor is back yesterday from the country, and is very particular all along of his having many valuables; and there's been two young men lately, as I don't half like, calling for him with parcels. And there's that

little silly slut of a girl-of-all-work of ours, that one you know, Miss Baker, as fetches the beer—who's a born fool, as I say—lets them sit down while she cleaned up the grate, and they asked a good many questions about his valuables, jewels, and what not; and, as we think, played some tricks as they didn't ought with the outer lock."

"Ah, it's an anxious life yours, Mrs. Harvey," said the sympathizing barmaid.

"Ah, indeed it is; what with mounting two-and-seventy steps every time you answers the attic, and he most unreasonable, and always sending out for bloaters and penny sporting papers, and screws of bird's eye, and shirking my wages if he can, not as my gentleman do that very often, as *I* take good care. Good night to you, Miss Baker; good night, Mr. Joe; good night, gentlemen all. No, not another drop to-night, David, you've had quite enough; now don't bump up against me like that, for goodness' sake."

No. 30, Buckingham Street, was not many doors off, out in the wide street to the right, and Mr. and Mrs. Harvey, having with stupid gravity examined the key-hole of the outer door, went in and slammed the door safely behind them, it being then exactly twenty minutes to twelve o'clock.

"More shentlemanly shentlemen," said Mr. Harvey to his amiable but rather inebriated wife,

"than these two swells ash treated ush to gin and bitters, and talked about Mr. Goodrick, who was a friend, says they, of their friend Mr. Bassevi, the picture-dealer, I never clapped my two eyes upon."

"Particularly, David," said Mrs. Harvey, resting to take breath on the second landing of the kitchen stairs, "the tall gentleman with the large dark whiskers, and which he was a nobleman's valley-de-sham, I'm sure."

"Rubbage, Liza," said Mr. Harvey, "he was a commercial gent, I know, by the way he talked nonsense to that Miss Baker. I call him very full of bounce, I do. I like a gentleman as is a gentleman, and keeps hisself to hisself, not one as keeps continally talking of glasses round."

"Stuff! now that's like your low talk, David. Commercial gent, indeed! he was no such thing; but there, you've had more than is good for you. You go to bed."

It was fully an hour later than this, that two men, one carrying a little black carpet-bag, stood in a door-way a good deal lower than that of Mr. Goodrick's, talking in an undertone.

"Shiv's up by this time, Danvers," said one, "he knows all the moves as well as if he'd been a screw man" (thief who uses skeleton keys) "all his life. He's been there before, and knows where the old gent puts everything."

"I don't half trust him, Monty," said the other, the lowering, violent ruffianly fellow who planned the plate robbery at Mr. Harker's, "ever since that partner of his in Charlotte Street bolted to America, and half burnt the house down, Shiv's been as sharp as a wolf for money. I believe if there's sparklers up there he'll have them all, even if he had to swallow them."

"You're always so suspicious of Shiv, Dan," said Montague, the more effeminate and pliant of the two rascals, "why bless you, he's all square. Didn't he put us on to that mint sauce job down Wiltshire; and didn't he pay us well for the horse trick?"

"Oh, yes, they were all right, he daren't double on us then, but why should he want to go up to do this job alone, and use the sleeping stuff on the old gent, when two are better for that than one? What tools did he take up?"

"He's got the keys and the alderman; the common councilman's here in the bag—the three jointed one."

"You say he's only got little side cribs to crack, and when the old gent comes in he'll hocus him, and get that wedge of notes of his he always carries about him."

"You trust to Shiv, he's a clever fellow."

"If I thought he was not going to divide the

swag square," said Danvers, furious at the very thought, "I'd go up now, by ——, yes, I'd go up now and give him such a rap with a Neddy as he wouldn't forget in a hurry, sweep what I could get, and leave him there to rot. No one shall ever double on me and not repent it. How infernal cold it is!"

"Yes, the wind comes up raw, curse it, from the river. I wish we'd some brandy. The old fellow generally comes back from the club, the slavey told me, at near one. He'll be here soon. Keep up close in the doorway. Hullo, here's some fellows drunk as Chloe. I think they're bound to that place opposite, where we saw the blokes at cards."

"There were four men walking two and two, and evidently much the worse for wine. They were chattering very loud and all together, and staggering to and fro. Gathering in a doorway nearly opposite, they began scratching fusees, lighting cigars, and singing refrains of comic songs. They walked down to the railings at the bottom, looked out on the river, then turned and walked up to the Strand end of the street. Every time they reached a certain door one of the men who had been "chaffing" a policeman at the end of the street, asked the rest in, and with tipsy jollity, reviled them for not coming in for "one more tum" (bler).

It was about twenty minutes to one that an elderly gentleman, in a spencer, came slowly down the echoing street from the Strand. The revellers had accepted the invitation, and gone in-doors at last, and could now be seen with the blind up, filling tumblers and dealing cards, one of them standing moodily at the open window and looking out down the street. The old gentleman gave one look up at the window, shook his head, then drawing out his latch-key, opened the front door of No. 30, and slammed it testily behind him.

It was pitch dark, the gas light usually left burning for him on the first landing had been carelessly turned out. The only sound in the hall was the dull tick, tick, of the kitchen clock, and the shrill monotonous cry of the crickets, now at their midnight Saturnalia. The staircase was a panelled staircase, and the stairs creaked ominously as Mr. Goodrick ascended them. He groped at a side bracket at the first landing for his candlestick and the matches, but they were neither of them there.

"That precious couple has been drinking again," he said, testily, as he ascended to his own floor, feeling along the wall and the banister to find where the stairs widened.

There were two sets of chambers on the second

floor—those on the left belonged to a navy agent, who was only there from 10 till 4; those on the right were Mr. Goodrick's. Neither on this second bracket, nor on the mahogany bench outside, where servants waited for messages, were the matches to be found. He stamped with vexation; to his surprise a faint sound seemed to reply from inside his own door. He stood and listened—there was a dead silence. Then he stooped down and listened at the keyhole. A sudden vague sense of fear struck cold at his heart. It seemed to him in that momentary panic that some one was breathing hot and thick, and in a repressed way, on the other side, and he felt half inclined to return down-stairs for a light. He stood there listening, and half irresolute, for several minutes, then ashamed of his own fears at such a constantly recurring situation, he drew out his keys, felt with his hand for the orifice, and inserting the key, threw open the heavy outer door, mechanically felt in the letter-box for letters, and let the slide fall with a jolt. Then he slammed the outer door behind him, and the jarring thunder seemed to echo through the whole house and shake it from garret to basement.

But first he inserted his second key, and opened the inner door; and the great black room lay before him, with a faint gleam from some

opposite window touching here and there the ceiling, the orb of the mirror, the white marble mantelpiece, the glass of the chandelier, and the gilt frames of one or two of the pictures. There was the table with the little cabinet on it, there was the easy chair by the window, just as he had left them when he went to dine at the club at six o'clock. Mr. Goodrick stepped to the mantelpiece for the matches and candle. He had just struck a light, when a dark figure, suddenly disclosing itself, leaped from the shadow of the large Dutch escritoire on the left of the room, blew out the candle, and dragged him to the floor. He struggled up, made a rush at the bell-ropes to ring for assistance, but they had been cut off, and before he could dash the outer door open and shout for assistance, a hand, holding a handkerchief dipped in chloroform, closed over his nose and mouth, and Goodrick fell insensible at the doorway.

The thief then struck a light, lit two candles, and began his search. He had just swept into a large carpet-bag two drawers full of brilliants, sapphires, and other jewels—he had wrenched open an escritoire and an ebony cabinet full of the rarest gold coins—when a noise in the street alarmed him. He opened the window, looked out, and listened, but it was only a drunken squabble at the opposite doorway, and he shut

the window again, and standing over the insensible man, began to search for his pocket-book. He drew it out, and after it two small jewel-cases, which he examined with the keenest curiosity. The one contained a large blue diamond, the very fac-simile of that which Beauflower had seen destroyed before his eyes; the other, the harlequin opal he had bargained for at the same time. Bassevi was still wondering at these, when the doors were thrown sharply open, and three men rushed in, drove him to the ground, and fell on him in a heap, as he fought and struggled to get a life-preserver from his pocket. It was all in vain, the jewel case flew from his hands, and an instant after a pair of handcuffs snapped sharply upon his wrists.

"Bring him down," said the burliest of Bassevi's captors, a superintendent of police, "and see to the old gent; he's been hocussed, I can smell it. Lucky for him that shop-boy of the Jew's let us into this pretty business."

"Why, this is lucky," said the great, good-natured, red-faced policeman, who had to lead Bassevi down to the cab that was waiting to take him to Bow Street, "this ere is a coincidence. Why we want you for two little jobs, a bit of arson in Charlotte Street, and a picture robbery at Rome ever so many years ago. Oh, you are an artful customer,

you are, and I suppose your name isn't Bassevi either. You won't speak. Very well, don't, and if you do, mind this, my old flick, that whatever you say will be taken down against you and used as evidence at your trial, my man."

"And here, Blewitt, or one of you," said the superintendent, up-stairs, "lift this gentleman on to a chair near the window, and give him some water, and pick up all those sparklers and guineas that are about the floor. He's had a near squeak for it, 'pon my word, a very near squeak; and you, Tompson, go with that Jew rascal, and we'll take the three off together, and put down the depositions."

Arousing David and his wife to send for a doctor and attend to their still half insensible lodger, the superintendent went down-stairs, one constable remaining with Mr. Goodrick, and the other dragging Bassevi, not over gently, by the collar.

In the hall were Danvers and Montague, each handcuffed, and in the clutch of a stalwart helmeted man.

"The gaff's blown, Shiv," said Montague, when he saw Bassevi coming towards them.

"It's over the herring-pond this time," said Danvers, who was bleeding at the mouth, "but mind this, I'll settle the hash of the first warder

that puts me down for short grub. They're always down on me at Portland, because I'm not a sneak like you, Monty, or Shiv."

The superintendent, as he arranged the order of march, for it was too late for a cab, walked up and down, eyeing his captives with ironical approval.

"And may I ask you three gentlemen," he said, "now that everything's comfortable, and we're ready to start, if any of you ever heard of some plate that was stolen, some months back, at a little place called Summerleas in Wiltshire? It needn't matter to you now you're in for seven years, and it would oblige us gents in the police."

"Don't know where he means," said Montague, "do you, Dan?"

"Can't imagine; you Bobbies are always so deuced full of chaff, and if we did know, what should we get for telling, eh? You d—— Bobby, I only wish I could have got my kennedy ready a moment sooner."

"And so you really thought we were gents as 'ad got tight? Well, we did keep it up pretty tidy," said the good-natured burly police constable to his young charges. "I'm blessed if I ever see a set of old cracksmen taken in so neatly in my life, and we were down on you, too, before you could get your knuckle-dusters handy. We'd

planned all that. We knew your time from Bassevi's shop lad, and we'd caught your pal with the light cart neatly, just as he turned out of Bedford Street."

"It was worth the trial," said Montague.

"Shut up, don't talk. They're only leading you on, you fool," growled Danvers.

"Yes, shut up," said Bassevi, "it'll be all in evidence. Let them find out what they can. We've lost the game, that's evident."

"Well, I should rather say you had, my noble swells," said the burly policeman; "but there, better luck next time. Your profession is like the Stock Exchange; it's a short cut to a fortune, but the worst of it is, that you sometimes break your neck in getting round the shy places.

Bassevi had only one secret regret, and that was that when the police broke in on him, he had not used his Spanish spring knife; but he deceived himself, he had not the courage to have done it, even if he had thought of it.

CHAPTER XIX.

FARMER BROWN'S LEASE.

It was a few days after Mr. Goodrick's departure for London, whither he went to see about the immediate prosecution of his claims, that Beauflower received a letter from him. The *Pieuvre* had been scared away at last for ever, for Mr. Goodrick had settled upon the Vicar and Amy 600*l.* a-year, with 400*l.* down to make up the round thousand. He did not wish, he said, to give so careless a fellow too much at once. But there was one trouble, one phantom of past folly still gnawing at Beauflower's heart, still casting a coffin-black shadow across the path of his sunshine. The blue diamond and opal had still to be restored, and the substitute stone Bassevi had not yet sent. He had twice written, however, to promise it, and to apologise for the delay. It was to be done on the 4th of October, and then he would require the money. It seemed to the sanguine and trustful man a fair and honourable

promise, likely to be fulfilled in a fair and honourable manner. It would be still possible perhaps to conceal the unhappy breach of confidence from his father-in-law's ears. Judge, therefore, Beauflower's mortification when he read the following letter.

"*October 2nd*, 1861.

"My dear Beauflower,

"You will be surprised to hear that I have been in great danger from burglars. On Tuesday night I came home late from the club, opened the front door of No. 30, as usual, and went up-stairs. The gas had been turned out, and I felt a strange sort of creeping presentiment that there was something wrong, yet I saw nothing, and heard nothing to justify alarm. Half ashamed of myself for these absurd fears, I strode up and unlocked my two doors. While I stood for a moment before opening the first, I fancied I heard some one breathing hard inside. I stooped and listened, but then it stopped. 'Pshaw, Herbert Staunton,' said I aloud, in my testy absolute way; and I unlocked the doors and went in. I struck a light at the mantelpiece and saw by the first flame a man stooping down over a broken cabinet of coin. I shouted and tried to pull the bell and give the alarm, but the rascal

had cut the bell-ropes, and before I could shout a second time loud enough to be heard in the basement, the thief had closed with me, and forced a large sponge, full of chloroform, over my nose and mouth. Then I swooned—it was lucky I ever recovered, for he had given me an unmerciful dose. Break this quietly to dear Amy. I indeed thank God, who has so often preserved me, for this escape. And who do you think the man proved to be? Why, a friend of yours—Bassevi—that blood-sucker from whom I have now set free four or five poor groaning galley slaves of artists, his victims. It appears that he had a hand in stealing that plate—you remember the ludicrous scene of horror—at Harker's. He had once called on me here, with a message from that worthy fellow Thorndyke, and had then, we suppose, "spotted," as the police inspector calls it, my special valuables. The two men with him were those smart-dressed bagsmen fellows who astonished the Slobury world, and eventually made so triumphant an exit. They had been engaged with him, years ago, in a very impudent picture robbery at Rome, so I suppose they had a hold over him directly he began to go down-hill, as he has been doing lately. Diamond cut diamond, I suppose; his partner Zöllner, alias Zimmermann, a monstrous rascal, has bolted to America, first

trying to burn the house down in order to conceal his frauds. I have great hopes we shall transport Bassevi and his two companions. But now I must relate the oddest adventure that has happened to me in London, not even omitting the over-chloroforming. The day after I got to town, Thorndyke sent a Mr. Joseph Lyons, a Portuguese Jew, to me with two jewels, which he thought I should like. They had been offered him in rather a mysterious way, and if I would not take them at once, he was going to start for Lisbon with them by the first P. & O. He owned, after some pressure, that he was a friend of Bassevi's. He wanted large prices. To my utter astonishment, when I opened the cases, I found that the one was my blue diamond, and the other my favourite opal. No one can deceive me in jewels. I knew them at once. I knew their exact weight, lustre, tinge, and mode of cutting. They are both, moreover, most unusual stones. Now, my dear boy, I know something of that strange country, the human heart, and feel sure I see almost exactly what has happened. You are stainless as gold, you are incapable of even a suppression of truth, except under the most cruel and imperative temptation and calamity. Now I have since heard that Mr. Hoffmann, the Prussian agent, had left before you got to London,

I remembered, too, at that time, that you were very preoccupied and anxious. Two and two together make four. I conclude that under some terrible pressure, for which your tender and pure conscience has since suffered agonies of remorse, you went and pawned these jewels to some one, very likely Bassevi, who deceived you by his tricks to believe they were worthless, or, perhaps, they still remain with him, and he prepared duplicates to deceive you, while he disposes of the originals. I have, therefore, retained possession of the jewels till I can hear from you. I know you will tell all, and from what you inform me I can soon discover to what tricks the villains had resort. I know all their finesses. My dear boy, I forgive you a thousand times over. I know the misery of debt, and I am confident of your flawless honour. Those very jewels Bassevi found on me while I lay insensible; it must have puzzled him to think how I possibly could have come by them. They were dropped in the struggle, and found by my laundress's husband a few hours afterwards; the fine blue diamond behind a bureau, and that glorious opal under the fender, of all places in the world. Later, Bassevi, feeling himself sure of transportation, on my visiting him at Pentonville and promising to do him one or two small services, made a clean breast of it, and

confessed the whole affair—how he got a blue-tinged crystal cut the weight and shape of my diamond, for which he substituted it during the four-and-twenty hours he had it for that purpose. It was that sham crystal, worth no more than three pounds, that he smashed in the sham test, which, by the bye, has been exploded these hundred and fifty years. In the stone he was buying for you he would have again, no doubt, cheated you, but that you escaped. The opal he dipped in soap-water and ammonia, which, as every lapidary and connoisseur knows, deprives it of all fire and lustre for a time, but for a time only. I recovered both my darlings without injury, therefore you have really been the greatest sufferer; for that you have suffered bitterly in mind for the momentary breach of faith, I feel sure. Well, all that, my dear boy, is now forgotten and forgiven, and we will never mention it again.

"I need scarcely, now that you are the husband of my child, the joy of my heart, conceal from you anything. It was I who bought the Cantelupe estates. I made an enormous fortune in Cuba, where my partner died of yellow fever, and left me all his share of the plantations. I have consulted that excellent fellow, Fairfield, about it, and he agrees with me that I must nurse the property, till I have reimbursed myself the

195,000*l.*, or nearly; for I won't be too sharp with the son of my dear father's old friend; and, in the meantime, I shall allow him 1000*l.* a year out of it to live on. This will make the young scatter-brain learn the value of money, and on this sum he can, if he likes to, marry when he grows steady. I think I can guess, as perhaps you can, to what point of the compass he will turn for a wife. Of my father's three staunch friends I have thus, you see, had the pleasure of serving two; and now, worthy old Farmer Brown must, in some way or other, have his slice of the cake.

"I have spun a long yarn, and must be off to the club, where I have an appointment with Thorndyke. I shall be down, God willing, on Thursday next with you and Amy. When walking or driving in my direction, call at Heart's Content, and tell Tony, my servant, (and master, I am afraid), and old Betty, to see that everything is nice and straight.

"I remain, my dear Ned,

"Your loving father-in-law,

"HERBERT STAUNTON.

"Rev. E. BEAUFLOWER.

"P.S.—A dozen kisses to Amy, for whom I have just bought something wonderful in Indian shawls. You will be glad to hear Fairfield thinks

that I shall have very small trouble in proving the forgery of the signatures to my father's will, and not much more in proving my own identity. Two survivors of the wreck off the Pearl Islands are now old men living at Jamaica, and I can easily obtain their affidavits. I have, also, all my father's and wife's letters, and several family papers and registers. That wretch had better pack up at once. He'll die a beggar even now.

"I am very sorry for poor little Ethel. For that bitter, proud, pushing, managing woman, and that sour, unreal, spiteful old maid, I feel no pity. Good-bye, I must now really conclude, for I've got to drive to the club, and then to attend the examination of Bassevi and his two companions at Bow Street. I long to see Amy and my dear Heart's Content again."

The Vicar had just finished this letter when the study door opened, and old Mrs. Beauflower appeared, perturbed on domestic subjects as usual.

"My dear Ned," she said, "I'm afraid that George has been drinking again; the servants have been calling everywhere for him. They want some wood, but he is nowhere to be found."

"It's too bad," said the Vicar. "I'll go after him."

"There's another more important thing I have

to say," said Mrs. Beauflower, "and I don't know what to do. Mr. Cantelupe is down-stairs in the drawing-room. I was called out to see the butcher, and I had to send Julia in to him, and now Mary's just been to tell me that she heard Miss Julia crying. What can it mean? Julia crying, of all people in the world. If he was angry, I should, of course, Ned, think she'd been saying one of her sharp cruel things, but she—— Ned, why do you laugh? I call it very serious."

"My dear old self-tormentor," said the Vicar, buttoning his coat across his chest, "you need not be the least alarmed, I think I know pretty well what the young scapegrace has been saying, and the answer he has got. He'll not forget it, mark me."

"Do go down."

"I will, directly."

"And don't treat everything so lightly."

"Yes, I must—light things."

When the Vicar opened the drawing-room door, if the truth must be told, Cantelupe's arm was evidently round Julia's waist, and his cheek was touching hers; but the moment the Vicar appeared, he turned abruptly to a photograph album, and Julia bent very low over some flowers.

"How de do, Beauflower? riding over, just dropped in."

"Just so," said the Vicar, with an arch knowingness, that refused altogether to be hoodwinked, "*popped* in, in fact."

"What do you mean, old fellow?" said Cantelupe, the tell-tale colour spreading like a prairie fire, with most subtle contagion, from his cheek to hers. "You seem very chaffy this morning, isn't he Ju—Miss Beauflower—"

The lover's confusion at this slip was too obvious. As the French say, "*il frappait aux yeux.*"

"My dear fellow, we are old friends," said the Vicar, seizing his hands, "Julia and you must therefore forgive my disdaining all evasions of ridiculous etiquette. You have been proposing to Julia, and I am very glad of it——(then he gave Julia a searching look); "she, like a wise girl, has accepted you, and like a foolish girl is crying from sheer joy. Come, say it is so, and join hands.

"There is no mistake about it, old fellow, you've hit it," said Cantelupe, "and I am ready to leap out of my shoes for joy."

Julia made no reply, but ran to her brother, pressed her arms round him, laid her head on his shoulder, and looked up shyly in his eyes.

"He's such a great careless fellow," she said, with still a sparkle of the old Beatrice vein; "and

he wanted some one to look after him——and to love him so."

* * * *

The Vicar had left the lovers at the gates of their Paradise, and had strolled out to call at Farmer Brown's before he returned to luncheon, as he had heard that the invalid son had not been so well for some days.

To his surprise, a large empty waggon stood at the door, with two chests of drawers lying in it upon some loose straw, and two of the farming men were bringing out an old oak wardrobe, watched by old Mrs. Brown; who, to judge by the apron held up to her eyes, had been, or indeed was at that very moment, crying. She shook Mr. Beauflower by the hands, and ushered him in silently. The invalid son sat by the side of the fire on the hearth, which had gone out, and was crying bitterly.

"Why, my good people, what is the matter?" said the Vicar, sitting down by the side of the invalid; "one would really think you were moving house."

"So we be, and that's the killcrow," said old Mrs. Brown, apologising episodically, with her true matronly instinct, for her dirty "yepparn" (apron). "It was this very morning, as ever was, that I was up-stairs about nine o'clock, sorting out some

pasmets (parsnips) in the spare room, when I heard John come slowly up-stairs, slower than he most in deal does, and clashing down a tool basket on our bed-room floor. I called out, 'What be'st about?' for I heard him unscrewing the bed, and he answered something I could not catch, for him rather *hash*. Now, thirty-four year I bide here, and never knew him come in from the fields and the men at that hour, so I looked out the pasmets and some apples as was spotting, and went in. Well, it did give me a turn, as you may believe, for there was John kneeling down taking our bed to pieces, and I saw a hot tear, as big as a wafer, fall on the boards close by where his head was turned sideways to me, like. 'Why, what ever ails you, with our bed, John?' says I, 'it doesn't want no taking to pieces. What be'st doing, man?' He never looked up, John didn't, but going on with his work, he says, 'Jenny, I'm taking down the bed, we leave here to-day.' '*Leave here to-day?*' says I, and nearly fainted. 'John, you've had a sunstroke?' 'No,' says he, in a low voice that went to my heart. 'Mr. Harker has refused to renew my lease, we who have been here three generations. Came here,' says he, 'from Wimborne in Dorsetshire, in 1730, and all out of spite about our poor son Bob and the keepers; so,' says John, 'I won't stop the last quarter, but mean to go at once.'"

Then the Vicar told the whole story of Mr. Staunton's re-appearance, and his likelihood of soon proving his father's will a forgery, and obtaining possession of the Abbey estate. In a word, on the good old farmer descending the stairs with a chair under each arm, Beauflower so reasoned with him, and encouraged him, as to persuade him to stay the quarter, and wait for the lease which would be readily granted by the new heir.

At the turn of the road to the great lodge gateway, who should come tramping along, with a carpet bag slung by a strap over his left shoulder, but Major Donovan himself? He was not in very good spirits, and looked rather vexed.

"Going up to town," he said, "about this patent for extracting waterproof varnish from horse-chestnut buds? Certain fortune, my boy, if we can only get a good analysis, and chemically imitate it. It's just the turn of a halfpenny, bedad, between me and millions; and I'm also going up about the old boy's visit. Can't get a copper now from those chaps, and they've reduced my agency two-thirds. Fair's fair. So I'm just going to look them up; and between you and me and the gate-post, squeeze it out of some of them, somehow, as sure as my name's Donovan. God bless you."

"If they don't pay, I don't envy the life the

Charlemagne Champagne Company will lead," thought the Vicar, as he entered the vicarage garden by the glebe field, in search of George. The workmen had just got the gilt weathercock upon the roof of the old tower, and were cheering as the plumber fixed it.

The Vicar found George sitting on the kail bed, a Wiltshire Marius moralising amid the ruins of Carthage. He had quaffed far too much of "*le vin triste*," and seemed absorbed in "alchiholly and musing."

"Always shaid we should shee the weathercocksh up in our time," he said, eyeing the church tower lachrymosely, "and now itsh all rait, and three sheers for the Queen and the people!—three sheers for red, white, and blue!"

The Vicar instantly discharged the reprobate for the three-and-fortieth time.

CHAPTER XX.

THE FACE AT THE WINDOW.

THREE days after Mr. Goodrick returned to Heart's Content, Mr. Harker received a letter from his solicitors, Fox and Shekell, saying that they were willing to fight the matter with him to the last gasp, but they had very little hope in the face of the evidence which Mr. Fairfield had kindly allowed Mr. Fox, in their presence, to read and examine. It was clear that the will of the late Mr. Staunton had been tampered with, and the paper given to Dr. Chevalier, sworn to by him, and handed by him to Dr. Briscoe, was most difficult to get over. It was, they feared, a desperate case. They were quite sure that he (their client) was innocent of all fraud, but fraud there had been somewhere, and there was not the shadow of a doubt that the will was invalid, and that the signature of Mr. Staunton was a forgery. Nor was it possible either to resist the overwhelming weight of evidence that pointed to the fact

that the quondam Mr. Goodrick, of Buckingham Street, was the sole surviving son of Mr. Staunton, of Summerleas Abbey, and the heir to all the property; but they were inclined to think, taking into consideration the death of so many of the parties concerned, and the very long time he (Mr. Harker) had been in possession, that it would be possible, by means of immediate compromise, before matters grew embittered, to obtain for him (Mr. Harker) a certain large annuity for at once surrendering possession.

"Fools and cheats," said Harker, grinding the letter between the bars of his study fire with a red-hot poker. "They evidently haven't a hope, and they're afraid of the whole thing, and want to drop it. That letter just means this, 'we throw up the game;' a week or two more, and I shall leave this place a beggar, despised and disgraced."

If it had been those old days when men made compacts with fiends who appeared at their wish, springing from the floor or the solid earth, stepping from the tree or wall, at the silent incantation, Harker would have whispered into the fire there before him, or into the darkness outside the glass-doors, and at once to the black shadow that came lengthening out from the flame or the blackness, have sold his hopes of eternal salva-

tion, and his place in the book of life, for a triumph over his inexorable enemy, who had at length, after a long ambuscade, hunted him down and stripped him of wealth, power, and fair fame. Dark thoughts, risen from hell, swept fast through his heated brain. Dark promptings of evil came to him from the dancing flame-light, as he sat in the dim room, without lamp or candle. Dark whispers came from his own shadow, black, shapeless, grotesque, resting half on the floor and half on the wall. Dark breathings of evil came from the night wind, shrewish and mournful in the keyhole, or rumbling moodily high up in the chimney, that seemed vibrating in the rising storm. They seemed like passing figures that darkened at intervals the bright glimmer that danced on the ceiling, or the glow and the mottled colour of the backs of the books that lined the walls; and on the tank, that like a black sarcophagus still stood there, under the window by the turning-lathe. Urgings to evil were descending on him and pressing round him on every side. Hell had arisen and gathered at his summons her dark, never-sleeping, ever-watchful bands. The good angels had left him, and watched him now mournfully and with lingering regret from the nearest star, invisible as it was. He thought and thought, struggling for foothold and handhold among

those doubts and fears that now relentlessly beset him, but nowhere was there hope. His mind, usually so quick and elastic, refused to move from the one thought of Travers's murder, and those two fatal words that memory again set tolling ceaselessly within his brain.

"On sufferance. On sufferance."

Then at that bitter thought he rose from where he had sat in front of the fire, brooding in its warmth, and with the red glow crimsoning those hands crime had once ensanguined, he ground his teeth savagely as he struck the coals heavily with a bruising blow of the poker, then snapping a match angrily, lit his lamp. He looked as resolute and iron-framed as a man of forty, as he stood there, with a dangerous lurid light in his eyes, staring round the room, and more especially on a litter of sticks in one corner, on the tank, and then out at the windows into the seething darkness.

There lay turned down on the table (left by Ethel, who had been reading there just before dinner,) a thick octavo volume bound in scarlet cloth. As he paced restlessly to and fro like a newly-caught tiger in a cage, Harker, from mere curiosity, took up the book, and drawing his easy chair to the table, read the page at which it had been left open. It was the Annual Register for 1849, and the leaf folded down by Ethel was a

page of the trial of that savage and determined man, James Bloomfield Rush, for shooting Mr. Jermy and his son, at Stanfield Hall, near Norwich, on November 26, 1848. Mr. Harker devoured the whole of the two pages where the book was turned down, and especially this part, which he read over and over, till it seemed printed on his brain in letters of fire:—

"*About half-past eight Mr. Jermy was sitting alone in his dining-room. His son and daughter-in-law were in the drawing-room, preparing for a game of picquet. Mr. Jermy left the dining-room and proceeded to the hall door. The moment he opened it, and came into the porch, some person discharged a gun at him, blowing his heart nearly to pieces, and breaking three of his ribs. He fell, and instantly expired. Immediately after this a figure entered by a door on the same side of the house, but lower down than the hall door, and proceeded along the passage, in which it dropped two papers. In his way the murderer encountered the butler, whom he pushed back into the pantry. Mr. Jermy, junior, came out of the drawing-room to learn the cause of the report. The man again fired, and Mr. Jermy fell down dead in the hall.*"

Harker's brain was on fire—he could read no more. Satan had sent the thought to the heart pre-

pared to receive it. He dashed down the book, turned, stared for a moment into the very centre of the red-hot coals, and clenched his right hand, as if it held a weapon in it to crush at one blow all his enemies.

The plan was desperate, yet it was safe. It was the night and the hour to do it. All thought of danger or detection he cast from him, looking only on the one certainty of triumph and revenge. It must succeed, detection was impossible. It was supernaturally wicked and subtle; there would be no sound, no sight, no track of the man who smote. "Murder, it is no murder," whispered the old voice from his shadow, "it is only retaliation! He wants to strip and disgrace you of your hard earned power and wealth; you stop him by shortening his life a few years, and securing yourself, by one act of daring, peace and rest and wealth for ever. You will call it robbery, and instantly arrest two of the worst poachers in the place on suspicion."

Instantly Harker set to work to realise his dark thought. While he was still reading that Rush trial, his eye had fallen on a black japanned tin case that stood among the sticks and rods in the corner of the room, behind the lathe. It contained that very air-gun of his dead boy's which he had lent to Lord Mazagan for his

nephew from Eton. It was that weapon which at that moment suggested to him the crime that would save him from misery and ruin. Very carefully he closed the shutters, listened first for a moment with one of the glass-doors open, to the rising wind driving flocks of frightened leaves over the lawn and surging in the terrace fir-trees. Then he drew the short gun out of its case, and selected half a dozen of the small bullets from a bag-full, which Lord Mazagan had also returned, and which he had put away in the right-hand top drawer of the lathe. It was a breech-loading air gun, and could contain air enough at one pumping to discharge six bullets. Harker took the gun to the lamp, and examined the weapon with an eager care. He pumped it full once, and pulled the trigger six times, to observe how almost noiselessly it discharged. The six slight pops, not louder than cracks of a child's whip, that it did make, he drowned by firing the gun quickly up the chimney with his left hand, and at the same time jolting the fire irons together with his right. But the wind was too boisterous for so slight a sound to be heard far. He levelled it, tried the piece, and observed where the notch of the back sight came against the edge of the fore sight. He passed his hand approvingly over the serrated surface of the butt.

Then he took out of a cupboard an old dark Inverness cape, and an old slouched black wide-awake, and placed them on a chair in a dark corner of the room. He next took out the key of the room door, and going out locked it on the outside, and went into the drawing-room. It was exactly twenty minutes past eight by the clock in the hall as he opened the drawing-room door.

Miss Harker was seated grimly at the piano, toiling at some showy false bit of execution. Mrs. Harker was writing letters at her Davenport, and Ethel, absorbed in a fairy story, laughed out a greeting to her father from under a cascade of golden hair.

"Oh, papa," she said, "may I come into the study for my book I left there? I'm reading such a horrid murder. May I come and sit with you?"

"No, Ethel darling, not to-night. I'm very busy, I want no one to come near me—no one, for two hours. Mamma, will you tell the servants no one is to disturb me? I've got some most difficult accounts to audit."

Mrs. Harker promised to attend to her husband's wish, and, returning to his study, he again locked the door. The moment he had done so he threw on the Inverness cape and the wide-awake, and tied a dark blue shawl handkerchief

so high over his mouth as only to leave his nose visible between the comforter and the shadow cast by the broad-brimmed hat. Quickly he pumped the gun full, loaded it, and placed five spare bullets in his waistcoat pocket. Then first lowering the lamp, the better to see in the outer darkness, and reconnoitring from the half opened glass-door, he tucked the short gun under his coat, and stealthily stepped forth. He remembered that Mr. Goodrick always sat in his study till ten o'clock without closing the shutter. He—the assassin—watching him safely from the darkness, could therefore shoot him dead in his chair, and escape without leaving any more track than the bullet leaves in the air. It was Saturday night, when the keepers usually relaxed the vigilance of their rounds, and Harker selected a path where no one was likely to meet him. If they did cross him in the darkness he could easily grunt out a "good night," in a feigned voice, and there was no light to show his face.

It was a stormy night at the very end of October, and the moon would not rise till nearly midnight. Just half an hour's walk to Heart's Content, where the murderer had to seek his unconscious victim. The dead leaves were driving in the wind. The storm surged through the fir-woods on the Terrace in paroxysms of

rage, that lulled only to burst forth again. The muffled man, heedless of the rain that beat fretfully in his eyes, and on the uncovered portion of his face, strode on along a lane that ran at the bottom of the Terraces, to the left of the hut where Travers was found dead, and under a viaduct that continued the terrace overhead. One thought of the keeper passed his mind at this spot, but the rage of that one thought drove him forward, and he passed on without even a pang of remorse. Two pools of fire his eyes appeared to himself, and he could hardly help thinking that the glare would betray him to anyone he met. But still he had no fear and never wavered.

He now got out of the deep lane, and cutting across into the Fontford road, by Miss Chivers's garden wall, crossed the highway, and struck up the retired lane that led to Heart's Content. It was a straggling upland path, leading towards Warminster, and between high, lonely fields, that had not been more than ten years or so reclaimed from the down-land they bordered. Far to the left ran the road to Bibury, to the right those slopes of fields that rose above Summerleas.

There was not even a labourer's house on either side of the hilly lane, only, about half way, a pond, and some disused cattle sheds, and, a little farther on, a spreading belt of young firs,

that faced the shrubberies of Heart's Content. In the intervals of the wind, that broke in waves against the trees, a person with keen ears listening very attentively, could hear from outside the gate of Heart's Content, the passing carts on the Fontford road. Then after those lulls, the wind would seem to go suddenly frenzied, and to burst in a storm of leaves which it had gathered from the ditches and the furrows, to scatter down the lane.

It was a lonely residence in that by-road ending in the Downs. Any two well armed desperate men, falling at midnight on that house, could have forced the door, cut every throat, and got out again on the wild bare Down with all the treasure, leaving no more clue than a trout leaves in the brook down which it flashes.

The man stood listening, with his hand on the latch of the gate, pressing it open with a hard, slow, even pressure, so that it should make no sound. Then a thought seized him, for he let go the latch with extreme care, and stole back into the farther darkness, beyond the firs. There quick, and with the iron resolution and cruel promptitude of his nature, he sat down under a hedge, pulled off his spring boots, took off his loose woollen stockings, and putting his boots swiftly on his naked feet, drew on the stockings over the

boots, so as to deaden all sound they could make on the gritty gravel, the dry brittle wood of the plantation, or among the dead crackling leaves inside the shrubbery. This done, he grasped his gun ready for action. There were five more lives in those bullets he carried, and for a moment he debated within himself whether it would not be better to kill the whole household and carry off some valuables, so as to remove all possible suspicion of anyone but thieves. If he could only get those confessions, or the affidavits, that Fox & Shekell had told him, Mr. Goodrick—bah! Staunton, for it must be him—always carried about him. Driven on by the demon of murder, his judgment blinded, all his senses full of the one absorbing thought, the man forgot that Amy would still be the heir, that the claims would still be pressed and other proofs obtained. He felt only the thirst for revenge, the insatiable thirst, the demoniacal resolution to destroy this enemy as he had destroyed the last.

He stood there, a mere inner core of blackness in the darkness of that October night, exulting in the omnipotence of evil, defying the hidden lightnings of heaven, glorying in the consciousness that he held his enemy's life in his hands. He paused, as an epicure does before tasting some costly fruit, enjoying by anticipation and

mentally the coming delight. The revenge in his hand was so sure, so baffling to any pursuer there might be. The rain would destroy all footprints, and keep policemen, keepers, and chance pedestrians in the publichouses, huts, or other places of shelter. With rifle or revolver the murderer would have felt uneasy about his caps or powder getting damp and failing at the deadly moment, but the silent and terrible air-gun required no care; nothing could mar it, or check its performance of the crime.

The murderer had again his hand firmly on the latch of the gate to the drive, he pressed it noiselessly open, but this time wedged it back and tied it with some string he had in his pocket, so that it should not baulk or hinder his quick silent flight homewards. Just at that moment the bells of Fontford began to chime, slowly and reluctantly at first, then gradually blending into a full peal. Na! ne! ni! no! nu! the gravely joyful sounds came by him on the fitful waves of wind, breaking upon the ear only for this instant, to be lost in the next.

And now softly, softly, with the velvet feet of a tiger stealing on his prey, the murderer crept between the laurels, his cape thrown back over his shoulders, his gun clutched ready in his hand. Another moment and it would vomit death on his

bitter enemy in that house. Brushing so swiftly past a large arbutus that the swish back of the outside branches made him start and pause and fancy he heard footsteps up the lane, and hear his own heart beat loud as a force-pump, and the blood buzz and sing in his ears, the man stole quickly round the laurels of the drive where it circled towards the house. Once round there he would see the window where the man he sought would be.

Yes, there was the window with the central blind of the bay down and luminous with the inner light. Now off the turf of the borders, silently his muffled feet moved cautiously over the noiseless gravel, on to the border under the window. The dead leaves gathered there rustled a little, but the great ominous roar of wind that just then blew fiercely past from south to north effaced all lesser sounds. Then, with his gun cocked, and a second bullet ready in his mouth, first feeling all the apertures of the gun, the murderer stole to the window and glanced through the opening left by the edge of the blind. There he was; yes, there was the old man he hated; he remembered his face now. It *was* Staunton, standing up by a paraffin lamp with a glass stem, examining the signature in an old engraving. Leo was lying at his feet. The murderer noted pitilessly the grey

hair, the eyes that had so often gazed in his with affection, the hand that had grasped his so often years ago. The thirst for blood rose, flooding his heart. He raised the gun, he levelled it with the subtlest aim for the bullet to pierce the man's brain, then paused a moment, and passing round to the side window, where the blind was not down, took aim again. Just at that moment Mr. Goodrick turned and saw the dark figure at the window. The start back, involuntary as it was, slightly diverted the murderer's aim. The bullet split the window and struck the upper part of the lamp, just where the glass stem joined the upper reservoir; it fell with a crash from the table on to the floor; in an instant the fire ran along the floor to the window, where it blazed up with a tremendous explosion, like the burst of fire from a crater, reddening the savage face outside; furious almost to madness, Leo, through the broken window and through the fire and smoke, leaped open-mouthed at the assassin. But already the man had reloaded, and shot the dog dead as he leaped full at him and bore him backwards. Then Harker rose quietly, and as Mr. Goodrick stood pulling at the bell-rope to summon assistance, he stood at the window and aimed steadily, and with malignant care, straight at his heart. That moment's

gloating delay lost him the game. God's hand moves quicker than the Devil's. As Harker raised the gun a second time behind the blind which was on fire, and behind which he had retreated, a strong hand flashed a lantern in his eyes, beat the gun from his hand, struck him to the ground, and grappled with him.

It was Beauflower; invited luckily that night at nine, with Dr. Briscoe, to a game at billiards, he had seen the explosion, and stolen on the man whom, from the gate, he had seen fire the first time through the window.

"Quick," he cried, "doctor! I've caught the man; it's Harker, it is, by heaven!"

But striking his captor a tremendous blow in the face with the lantern wrested from him, Harker, by a great effort, slipped from the Vicar's grasp.

"Strike him down," shouted Beauflower to the doctor, who was clubbing his stick at the gate, "he's close to you now! Stop him!"

The next minute the doctor's blow fell savagely on the murderer, who, however, driving him back by a rush that sent him to the ground, flew into the darkness away across the Downs.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MAJOR'S HOUSE-WARMING.

It was a windy, wet night, that the major and a burly and not very prepossessing, friend, knocked and rang at the door of the Anglo-Champagne Company. The two men, rather grimly silent, watched for some minutes, looking up at the windows; but there was no light, and no sound. On a third time pounding at the door with the knocker, a candle appeared at the first floor, and an old bleary woman threw up a window, looked out, and said in a querulous, frightened voice—

"Who are you? we're all a-bed. What is it? —what do you want? All the gentlemen are gone, and the office shut up these four hours. If you don't go away, I'll call the police."

The major's companion growled like a bulldog, but only whispered. The major was bland and frank.

"Get out of that, old mother Harrison," he

cried; "why, it's only me, Major Donovan, who brought you that snuff the other day. I know all the little game. I want to come in and shake my elbow a bit."

"That's quite another thing. Oh, it's you, Major Donovan!" chuckled the old hag, disappearing with the candle.

"We're on 'em, major," said Donovan's friend; "keep quiet, and we'll have 'em snug as ninepence. You be rather sprung, and mind, I'm the rich farmer from Essex; you've brought me to see life. Perhaps they'll let me win a few shiners, and that won't hurt anyone, you know."

"Right you are, Jim," said the major, tucking his big blackthorn under his arm, as the old woman, shuffling at chains, and reasoning with rusty bolts, eventually opened the door, and with her lean, wizen hand, shading the candle from the gusty October wind, let them in, and instantly closed the door behind them. There were still two green swing doors, studded like jovial coffin lids with rows of brass-headed nails, between the front door and the outer hall.

"Why, mother, they *have* been a-doing the place up nice," said the major; "bedad, it bangs Banagher now; is your old man below? he knows what I want; tell him to be ready in a quarter of an hour at the front door, and he'll find his friend

where I told him; you mind what I say, now."

"There they are a-going of it, like good uns, as I thought," said the major, as he pressed through the two green valves into the more central part of the house. They certainly were "going of it."

"It is very lively to-night; there are strangers in the club—very rich gentlemen, I think. I heard one was a marquis."

It was lively. There came from open doors up-stairs the sound of half-tipsy voices, the rattle of dice, and the fitful whir-r-r of the roulette wheel, while a sonorous foreign voice was shouting—

"Make your game, shentlemens, while the ball is rolling—faites le jeu, messieurs et mesdames, faites le jeu. (Whir-r-r), le jeu est fait; rouge paie et la couleur gagne."

Then there was a shout of applause and execrations, a chink of money and of glasses, a great explosion of champagne corks, and finally a roar of tipsy laughter, as some one fell off his chair, and some one else flung a pack of cards, swishing in a red, white, and black shower down the staircase.

"Come along Jim," said the major, and in their wet, dripping long coats, he and his friend

ascended the stairs. They were received with a shout of surprise and applause by the directors of the Anglo-Champagne Wine Company. It was quite an ovation. Mr. Greenway called to a page boy, who was waiting to bring two devilled brandy-smashes for the two gents who had honoured them. Darkaschunder, in a scarlet fez cap, paused in his task as croupier, and held up a full champagne glass to them. The German gentleman, who was busy staking money fast on the red, which had come up four times running, roared out a scrap of a German drinking-song about—

> "Ninety times, ninety times, ninety-nine,
> And ninety times nine brave tailors."

"Gentleman from Essex; great grazing farm; wants to see life, and try his luck," said the major, pointing out his friend, as they stripped off their coats, and placed them with their serviceable sticks in a corner by the window. The major was noisy and excited; he sang a good deal, as he sat down in the close, glaringly lit room beside the fat German croupier, and whispered, looking towards his friend, who was already busily at work at a small side loo table with a party instantly organised.

"Book full of notes; rich as Crœsus—jolly green."

The baron winked at Mr. Greenway and Mr. Darkaschunder, and then they all winked approval, but almost imperceptibly to the major.

"Pray, what's your favourite tipple, sir?" said Mr. Greenway; "I think you'll find this Curaçoa Punch licks creation, and would give it odds; or will you have Cham?"

"It is very prime," said the Essex farmer, a man with small lips, flattish nose, and rather a coarse bumpy forehead. "That'll do for me—come, play away gents; it's all luck. That makes 5*l.* to me, but it's cursed slow. Suppose we go for 10*l.* this time?"

"Agreed, agreed! you're a man of shpirit. I like to see men of shpirit," said the baron, laughing, till his piggish eyes were half buried in the red fat of his cheeks; "but mind, my lieber gentlemans, I don't go higher than 10*l.* Mein Gott! what luck has this Herr from Essex? He knows a trick or two; he can makes the cards do what he likes."

"I'll bet 20*l.* I win this round," said the Essex man, elated by the praise.

"I'll take ye," said Mr. Darkaschunder, wetting his thumb to deal.

In the meantime, while the major was only staking a pound or two on the red or black accordingly as the colours seemed to promise

sequences, the strangers present were busy, especially the gallant marquis, already half drunk, and talking to every one, heedless of the game in which he was being fast stripped, and drinking champagne in tumblersful, seemed, singularly enough, to be generally losing.

"Lend me two fivers, marquis; by thunders, the red has been up six times, and I'll lay a hundred now, right away, on the black," said Mr. Greenway. Boy, bring some fizz here, the marquis hasn't got a drop in his glass."

"Lend, be d——," said the marquis, "you Yankee beggar; I'll put all I've got on the black myself. What good are you? you're no good. Baron, lend me one or two tenners, man, I've got a doosed good chance here. Haven't had such a chance since I cleared out Cantelupe once at Doncaster; pot of money, by Jove; bet him four thousand the colour stopped. There's nothing like plunging, my boys.

'Up to anything you like, my boys,
Up to any hour you like, my boys,
For Champagne Charley is my name, my boys——."

Whir-r!

"Lost, by the Lord Harry! Come, you chaps, we'd better get out of this hole. The ball does

not run fair. I swear I saw him do something underneath. I mean that blackguard nigger."

In an instant there was an uproar, and the gang began to form phalanx, and clutch at the stakes.

"Come; no cursed nonsense, gentlemen," said the Lablache sort of baron, advancing with cards in his hand; "we're all enjoying ourselves, you know. This friend of the major's from Essex is clearing us all out; everything here, I shvear, is fair and honest—don't make a row, and spoil it all. If the marquis wants his last money back, Darkaschunder will give it him."

"No, no," said the black baboon savage at the discovery; "he lost, he pay; gentleman lose, gentleman pay. I lost just now. I didn't complain of the table, I paid. Mashalla! He shan't have his money."

"Won't I, by Jove, you thieving scoundrel?" said the marquis, clenching his fist. "You chaps, let's go in and punch these blackguards' heads. Dillon, you're ready, I can see. Come along, Probyn, we'll go in at 'em; we're not going to be robbed like this."

"Up wid ye now, Jim!" said the major, making for his stick, and whizzing it round his head as Jim, with the unmistakeable quietude of the professional athlete (for Jim was not unknown in the

Essex marshes), threw off his coat, and squared his enormous arms.

"Marquis, I'm on your side, bedad! we'll polish off the whole lot—the dirty blackguards!" shouted the major, kicking over the loo table, and smashing the roulette wheel, to prevent its removal.

> "We'll pay the reckoning on the nail
> And divil a man but goes to jail,
> From Garryowen, my glory."

The retreat from Corunna, the retreat from Moscow, was nothing to the dismay and confusion as some of the strangers present, suddenly awake to a sense of danger, either joined the marquis and the major or skulked away downstairs with or without hats, coats, and sticks, as the case might be.

Mr. Greenway's eyes flashed fire, as trying to cram a dozen or two sovereigns, half of which fell on the floor, into his pocket, he drew out from his waistcoat one of those small deadly double-barrelled Derrenger pistols that New York swindlers often carry, and slowly cocking it, advanced on the marquis.

"If you folks don't get out of this quickly," he said, "I'll make the tallest dead body of one of you right away. I don't care which it is, but I just

let you know that there'll be a coffin wanted to-night, and it won't be for me."

"Don't you make too sure of that," said the redoubtable major, as enraged at this he leaped forward like a tiger-elephant, and struck a tremendous blow upwards at the hand that held the weapon. It knocked it into paralysis. The pistol flew to the ceiling from the crushed and mashed fingers of the swindler and exploded twice. Maddened at this, the rogues made their rush, seizing anything, chairs, chimney ornaments, sticks, decanters, tumblers, champagne bottles, fighting their way to the door, which was now blocked by the marquis's party. Discord at that sight gave a thieves' whistle for help from below. Cunning tried to turn off the gas, and Terror cowered under the table.

Oh, for the pen of Homer, or of the great poet of the Niebelungenlied, to describe the prowess of the major and his hired champion, who proved a glutton at his work! On the burly baron's bullet skull first fell the major's potent staff. The baron's champagne bottle, flung too hastily, beat out the back window, but not the major's useful brains. Then the major flew at the American, who, with his left hand, had drawn a spring knife, and was running at the marquis; with deadly truth on the tendinous part of the left

wrist, just where the ulna and radius join to receive the plaited bones of that great piece of mechanism the hand, the weapon smote, and the howling rascal fell under Jim's feet, who kicking him away into a corner made straight at the Hindoo, who waving two decanters, was calling to the boy to throw soda-water bottles as fast as he could. With the first decanter the Hindoo prostrated Jim, but before he could discharge the second, the major catching him between the eyes, drove him half way downstairs, with the shock of a catapult. The marquis, down for a moment from a blow with a tumbler, instantly rallied in the pluckiest way, and struck another of the gang a teeth splintering smasher with the leg twisted off a chair. Then there was a rush over the fallen, and the swindlers were driven backwards downstairs and through the passage (suffering rather at the green doors), into the street.

But even there the gods were pitiless on the fallen; at the door old Mrs. Brown's husband and four stern men in blue, pewter as to the buttons, armed as to the hands, rushed at their collars.

> "And every one of 'em goes to jail,
> From Garryowen, my glory."

"I give all these in charge, Sergeant Davis," said the major. "They're all swindlers. They've

swindled my friend Robinson out of three quarters' rent, then they started a gold hell, you'll find the pieces upstairs; what's more, they owe me for a half-year's agency for their swindling company; and what's more still, they tried to murder me and these noble swells here, and would have done it but for me and Jim Owen, who, if I may be allowed to publicly thank him, I must say, handled his mauleys superb, and I propose my noble sportsmen to send the hat round for a few guineas, for if it hadn't been for me and Jim, you'd have been nowhere, with all your pluck, and I beg to say that though sovs. is the rule of the evening, fivers will not be turned away at the doors. Jim got it very heavy once, but he finished his man at last. You'll find him under the table now, I'll swear. My boys, I propose a little stout and bitter at the 'Apple Tree,' to all noble sportsmen requiring refreshment."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CHEMIST'S SHOP IN THE EDGEWARE ROAD.

That wretched man—his left arm broken by the blow from Dr. Briscoe's stick—fled without hat or cloak, for he dropped the latter for speed, and the first had fallen in the grapple with the Vicar. He ran as far as he could, falling now and then over furze-bushes or ant-hills, but keeping, as well as he could, the direction of Wiley, where he knew an express train to London passed at about a quarter to twelve. Breaking into the high-road from a fir plantation, at about three miles from Fontford, from whence no sound of wheels, hoofs, or any other form of pursuit reached the faint and wounded creature, he rested. The moon just then shone out fair, pure and bright, and showed all the grey roofs of Fontford, and the little needle of a spire, small in the distance.

Three miles farther on, near eleven, the trap of a great red-faced hearty commercial traveller overtook him. Harker asked him for a lift; he had

lost his hat, he said, in the dark, having mistaken his way, fallen down a ridge, and hurt his arm. The driver gave him a lift with pleasure, having no fear of a scared, helpless-looking man who seemed much hurt. They stopped at an inn in Wiley, and Harker refusing to get out, the man kindly brought him out a hot tumbler of brandy-and-water. The traveller also, at Harker's request, went into the first village shop, and while Harker held the reins, brought him a common felt wide awake. He was going on to Amesbury that night, so at the turning to Wiley, the traveller jovially wished Harker good night, and drove on.

At half-past eleven Harker ventured into the station, and slouching his hat and drawing up his comforter, asked for a second-class ticket to London. That left him only four shillings. Presently the fiery eyes rushed into the station, with a pant and hiss and bellow; the murderer crept into a corner of an unoccupied second-class carriage, and the train bore him away—whither?—hope, happiness, virtue gone. The good angels had left him for ever. Fiery evil faces were distorted with hideous laughter as the train flew off roaring with the murderer to the great receptacle of crime and honour, of joy and misery, of Dives and of Lazarus. Most miserable of sinners, he had given his soul away, and the payment had

turned to dust in his hand. It seemed as if some demon monster had come for him now and borne him off to Eblis.

Oh, the torturing hours that he dozed or woke to think of the past, and tremble for the future, and to groan in agony of hopeless remorse at the earthly and the heavenly happiness he had surrendered for a dream. Again he recalled the warm, luxurious room he had left locked already, no doubt, broken into by rough eager cruel men. again he retraced every step through the wood to the gate, and to the window of "Heart's Content." He saw again the grey-haired man at the lamp, heard the gun's faint report, heard the lamp crash; saw the flame burst forth as from a door suddenly opening in hell; saw the dog leap and fall. Then came the grapple with the man who seized him and who saw his face, the flight, the maiming blow, the anguish of the walk, the risk of the station, and now, was it only an evil dream? Then he fell asleep, dead asleep.

A sharp cry of "tickets, tickets," awoke him.

"Where's this, guard? what place is this?"

"Your ticket, man, you're half asleep. Can't stop here all night. Why, Waterloo of course."

London.—Four o'clock in the morning. Had the telegraph anticipated his flight with its magic wire? No, there was no policeman, only one

or two sleepy porters who let him freely pass into the street. Fierce animal hunger was on him, as he walked far into the Borough away from everything, and at the corner of Baalzephon Lane went into a squalid coffee-house, a nook that only the workmen of a neighbouring fellmonger's frequented. He ate and drank largely, and that left him only two and ninepence. Presently one of the men began reading in a country paper a paragraph about the death of a beggar, a "tout" and race card seller in Wiltshire; a man named Blake, who, mad with drink, had broken open a Mr. Harker's stables, stolen a horse, and ridden till he fell dead.

"I've heard that name Harker," said another of the men; "he's the richest bloke in the county, except the Marquis of Westminster, who has they say 1000*l.* a day."

Instantly paying what he had to pay, the murderer, with one frightened glance at the speakers, slunk off towards the New Cut, where he might bury himself among sordid people, who would not know him nor wonder at any form of misery.

Towards night, after more food, which left him only a shilling and some pence—for he had left his watch and chain at home and had nothing but his clothes that he could pawn, and they were wet

through by a sudden shower—the murderer found himself in the Regent's Park, so fatigued that he could scarcely walk, and caring only for death. There, under one of the loneliest trees, dreading every policeman he saw in the distance, the wretch fell asleep. It had rained again and it had also grown quite dark while he was asleep, and he arose chilled and aching. He must die now; he would not live to endure that searching misery, or the degradation of a gaol and felons' company. With an outburst of his old savage resolution, he drew his hat over his face, and leaving the park, walked, fast as his tired limbs would carry him, to the Edgeware Road. The lamps were lit, and their light was golden on the wet pavement and in the puddles.

Suddenly the stones turned as crimson at his feet as if he had entered a slaughter-house. He shuddered: a palsy of fear seized him. He looked up: it was a chemist's. He paused a moment under the red lamp: then staggered to the door and asked for a shilling's worth of morphia. The man, busy at the moment, paid him no attention. Then he looked insolently and contemptuously up from his pill machine and said,—

"I say, my man, don't you put your wet arms on my counter. There's the morphia for you.

Mind, it's poison in over-dose—for tooth-ache, I suppose ?"

"Yes; there's the shilling. Good night."

Harker clutched the two-ounce bottle, and went out. Death—the power of death—was once more in his hand; but this time for himself—for himself! Another hour, where should he be? At rest for ever, or in eternal torture? in changeless sleep or before the veiled judge and the accusing dead? No, that way lay madness. He spent his last pence on gin—tossed off the fiery vitriol, and felt his brain burn with it as he wished, for with the fire came some rest. As he hurried on through the selfish jostling crowd a ragged man stopped him, mistaking him for an old friend. Harker shuddered, though so near the edge of the grave, for he thought the man had recognised him and was going to arrest him; but the man passed on laughing, and with a burly oath turned into the nearest public-house to laugh over his mistake with his friend the landlord, who poisoned men in a respectable legal sort of way.

At the corner of a turning southward of Praed Street, a crowd stopped him. They were gathered round a hoarding, reading something. Harker pushed through them and came to a placard:

MURDER!

£100 REWARD!!

It was a reward offered for the discovery of the murderer of John Travers, gamekeeper to Jabez Harker, Esq., of Summerleas Abbey, Wiltshire.

Harker pushed on, paler than before, hardly daring to turn round lest he should see the murdered man himself following him; and every face in the crowd, suddenly reddened with accusing blood, seemed to turn and stare at him as he fled. At the corner of Praed Street at last, he turned down a mews, sat down on a dunghill, and tossed off the poison at a gulp. He was mad—almost mad with despair. No thought of wife or children—no thought of anything but escape from the agony of despair and the shame of exposure. No; he would not die there; he would go back to the park, and expire in peace under a tree, where no one would find him till he was stark dead and beyond the reach of justice or of enemies. So he rose and went.

But the deadly venom was too swift. Half benumbed with the fatal lethargy, he was just staggering across the street, turning eastward, when, in the scudding rain, a half-blinded and rather drunken cabman, driving a flashing hansom at frantic speed, struck him down, crashed over him, and passed on.

In an instant a crowd, with a policeman in it, seemed to rise out of the very earth, and closed round the miserable groaning mass of blood and mire that a moment before was a vigorous, healthy man.

"Take him to an hospital," said one energetic person.

"Call a cab," said another.

"You look here, you fellows," said a well-dressed thin young medical student, pushing through the crowd, an eye-glass in his eye, and looking at the body; "my name's Dobbie. Take him to St. Mary's. It seems a regular smash up, but it'll be a very interesting case, no doubt. I'll be with you in a crack. I'm a dresser there."

"Take him to St. George's, Bobby," cried a brewer's man.

"St. George's? swell humbug," said the student. "St. Mary's, cabby—just handy—right you are, drive on."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FORSTER WARD.

It was three days after this that Mr. Staunton—who had come up to town by desire of the police to assist them in searching for the would-be assassin—ascending the steps of his club, nodded to the porter, who had already read of his extraordinary escape. It was about five o'clock, and the rooms were full of the usual *quid-nunes*, busy at the newspaper stands and at the files. In his favourite corner he found his old crony, Hargrave, rather shattered by a recent illness, but still chatty, cheerful, and sociable. Mr. Goodrick instantly sat down by his side, took his hand, dipped at his snuff-box, and engaged with him yard-arm to yard-arm. He was glad to find his old friend looking so much better—yes, so much better than he had been led to expect; and there these two old club associates sat, like two school-boy friends, for a moment silent, then lapsing into quiet conversation.

As Mr. Staunton was going upstairs to the library, that dreadful bore, Huskyson, buttonholed him with some secret back-stair and most important intelligence just arrived from Berlin. Would he believe it, the Duke of Oberkopfundohrindet has suspended diplomatic relationships with the Duke of Ledernekopf, the result would probably be a European war and a junction of all the small duchies against Prussia. "There's such a storm brewing, my dear sir——"

"As never was seen, I suppose, in any slop-basin——"

At that moment one of the club pages brought Mr. Staunton two letters. One was from Amy—dear Amy. Edward had started for London, with Dr. Briscoe and Vincent the police-constable. They had got some clue to Harker, and had instantly started for town.

Amy's letter, gentle and affectionate of course, was full of thanks to God for her grandfather's escape. "Ned tells me," she said in one part, "that when he looked towards the house and saw that wicked man standing dark against the gush of flame, he really thought for the moment that Hell had shot forth some monster, but in an instant—brave fellow!—he saw the real danger and dashed forward."

Just as Staunton was pacing the hall of the

club, waiting for a friend, one of the servants ran up and said there were three gentlemen waiting for him in the strangers' room. He went and found Beauflower, Dr. Briscoe, and P.-C. Vincent. They had received intelligence from Scotland Yard that Harker had been tracked to the Waterloo station, and from there to a coffee-shop in the Borough. Inquiries had been made at the Docks, at the steam-boat wharfs, and at all the railway stations, and nothing being traceable anywhere, it was thought he must be looked for in some of the parish dead-houses, or that he would be found somewhere in the river. Vincent was that night to go round to the hospitals and see if he could discover him in any of the wards, and the next night a detective was to take him round to some thieves' lodging-houses, where the wretch might perhaps be lurking. Beauflower and the Doctor were to sleep at the Tavistock, and to be called the moment any information could be obtained.

About eight o'clock the next morning, P.-C. Vincent and a London detective tapped at Beauflower's door.

"We think we've heard on him, sir," said Vincent, "at St. Mary's Hospital. It's a man as was run over last Sunday night, about nine o'clock, in the Edgeware Road, and was taken to the Paddington Hospital. The hair and eyes

answer, and the dress, and his linen is marked J. H.; it's he, sir, sure as you're alive. I've got a hansom at the door, and have sent a close cab for Mr. Staunton, who'll come on here while you're taking a snack as Dr. Briscoe has already ordered. Don't hurry, sir; but the quicker you are the sooner we shall know if we've got our man."

"All right—down in a minute, Vincent," cried Beauflower.

The party was collected and ready in about three-quarters of an hour, and the two cabs drove together swiftly to the Paddington Hospital. A vague horror was filling Beauflower's mind. His father-in-law and Dr. Briscoe were silent and anxious. The policemen coldly discussed the points of evidence in an under-breath. Presently the cab swept round to the hospital portico. A large, ugly, square, many-windowed building, with St. Mary's Hospital inscribed in large letters on the front, stood before them, as the drivers got down and threw open the doors.

It was just nine, and one or two poor sickly and bandaged persons were hanging about the steps, waiting for 9.30, the hour when the house-surgeons see the minor surgical cases, and out-patients can come without either letter or order. The pallid creatures at Death's door gathered

closer, full of curiosity to see a new patient, but, to their infinite disgust, five healthy men stepped out and went up the steps.

The detective ran up first, and spoke to the porter, who emerged from his little side room, and looked at a series of handles and speaking pipes labelled with the names of the different wards. The man, who had been expecting them, led them without a word to a door out of the hall to the right, above which were written the words "Secretary's Office." A tall, thin, grave man in black bowed as they entered, and offered them seats.

"You've come, gentlemen," he said, "as the officer informed me late last night, about a man who was brought here on Sunday, run over in the Edgeware Road. Here is our entry.

"'9.30 p.m., Sunday, October 30, 1861.—Man brought in suffering from the effects of morphia. He had taken so large a dose that he had been unable to retain it, and the usual antidotes proved efficacious. While drowsy with the poison a cab had run over him, and crushed both his legs just above the knee.'

"That is our note, gentlemen. The man's legs had to be instantly removed by Mr. Spencer Smith. You can, if you like, see the man. He still lingers, but there is small hope of his reco-

very. He refuses to give his name, but his linen is marked 'J. H.' Mr. Lane told me he could not last very long, but the nurse sent down word this morning that he looks better and had taken a little nourishment, but his mind still wanders."

"We will go up, if you will allow us," said Dr. Briscoe, quite at home in an hospital. "We only want to identify the man; it is a person who's been trying to commit murder."

"Good gracious!" said the calm registrar, turning over his ledger to begin a pleasant, new, clean leaf. "You don't say so. Well, I'll send one of the messengers with you, and the nurse can take you round."

The secretary rang a bell for a man. When he came he said, "Davis, take these gentlemen up to the Forster Ward, and tell Mrs. Bellamy to show them the patient they wish to see."

The man bowed, and led them stolidly up the great blank stone stairs past two great doors, one inscribed "The Thistlethwaite," the other "The Grafton Ward." The Forster Ward was on the second floor. They went higher. The man opened a door quietly. There was a long corridor with a clean planking and a double row of beds. Mrs. Bellamy emerged from the little room, that had a window commanding a view of the whole perspective.

"Man run over last Sunday?" she said, looking rather sternly at the visitors. "Oh, you mean No. 44." Here her face softened, and her eyes glanced down the ward. "*Friends* of No. 44?" she said.

"No; come to identify him for attempt at murder down in the country."

"Oh, then, I will show you him."

They passed between rows of pale sleeping faces. One or two of the patients sat up in bed and stared at them with hollow or with fevered eyes; two or three groaning wretches turned uneasily and muttered as they passed. The nurse paused just beyond the second fireplace in the extreme left-hand corner of the ward at a bed, round which the coarse blue check curtains were closely drawn.

Mr. Staunton made a motion not to disturb the poor wretch. He was perhaps asleep, the unhappy man, with both legs lately amputated. The others spoke to him in a whisper, and said to the nurse they would return when the man awoke and had had his breakfast. The nurse gave the policeman a hard look of intelligence. It was only business to her, all this—mere routine; she had lived side by side with death, and did not fear its approach; the detective caught the meaning of her look, said nothing, but strode forward, his

great boots clumping ruthlessly on the uncarpeted planks. With a rough hand he dragged back the curtains, rasping the rings along the brass rod on which they were strung.

Yes; there lay the murderer. It was he. They knew his brow, his hair, his features, *but he was dead;* his wretched face, hideously distorted with the pangs of death and of remorse, lay there, a wax mask with the glassy eyes fixed. The hand with the tattooed wrist, had clutched the bedclothes, and still held them.

"He's hooked it," said the London policeman. "Lucky for him."

"He is gone," said the Vicar, closing the curtains, and turning solemnly to his friends, "gone beyond our reach, and to a more awful Judge. 'I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. Yet he passed away, and lo! he was not; I sought him but he could not be found.'"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE GOOD-BYE.

WHAT have we more to tell? In less than a year Mr. Fairfield wrung from Fox and Shekell the last acre of the Staunton property, and reinstated the rightful heir, who celebrated his enthronement by a grand banquet to half the county, by an ox roasted whole, and also by several roasted tar-barrels, which, though less nutritious, lasted longer than even the ox.

Cantelupe, having sown his wild oats pretty lavishly, pulled up and tried a more profitable crop. He married Julia Beauflower in about three months after Harker's miserable death, and soon discovered who it was who had so generously saved his estates for him. Lord Mazagan, who had not put out a finger to help his unfortunate nephew, expressed to the Duke the other day at the club his opinion that "Fitz had pulled through very well—very well, indeed." In a year

or two, both at the Castle and the Vicarage, little voices began to be heard, and little feet began to paddle about the corridors. Two happier couples were not easily to be discovered; and as for Edward and Amy, the Dunmow Flitch would have been but a small reward for their undeviating harmony.

Mrs. Harker and her daughters with some money they had secured, went to live at Boulogne, while a rich uncle, a lawyer at Exeter, took care of Ethel. Mrs. Harker, worn out by grief and mortification, had a paralytic stroke two years after her husband's death, and Miss Harker married a French count of supposed enormous wealth, who, however, proved a billiard sharper, and beat her terribly.

And now for our minor characters. Mr. Pitts became bankrupt two years after our story ends, chiefly owing to his having been fined for sending mangy meat to the London market. That good old soul, Farmer Brown, had his lease renewed, and prospered. The wild son, by dint of incessant pipe-clay, rose at last to be sergeant of the Life Guards, which honourable situation he still holds with honour to himself and credit to his Queen and country. The younger Miss Chivers is dead, but the elder Miss Chivers is

still a special favourite at the Vicarage, and the sworn adviser of Amy. Mr. and Mrs. Robinson live at "Heart's Content," handsomely pensioned by Mr. Staunton, and as happy and cozy as two old love birds. George has married, and has just taken the pledge for the fourteenth time. Mr. Bassevi is at present in one of our remote colonies, studying the geology of the district of which he is the ornament, and devoting himself to lapidary pursuits on one of the Government high roads, which he has tended greatly to improve. The rough energy of Mr. Danvers and the polite urbanity of Mr. Montague are also helping to enlarge the civilisation of the same noble region of the world.

The major is at present consul at Clarence Island, Tierra del Fuego. The following extract from his last letter will show exactly what he is doing, and his present proud position:—

"I have plenty of time to myself," he writes, "and I think the place in time will be a first-rate station. Our volcanoes are very active, our birch timber is plentiful, our slate and hornblend are magnificent, our foxes' skins a valuable article of commerce. A Patagonian fisherman (seven feet two) has just brought me the gratifying news of the discovery of gold in one of the mountain

streams. This must be looked into. My population is chiefly black and whitey-brown, fond of whiskey, and not industrious, but the schoolmaster is abroad and two recent wrecks have enriched our glorious, glorious island with no less than fourteen Lascars, six negroes, and four Chinamen. If you could hear of a tidewaiter's place that would suit me, and that was a little nearer London, I should like it; but there is great scope here for the philanthropist, and my big stick smooths the way for the future missionary. Hurrah! Just got news of a big Yankee schooner on shore. I must be off to protect the property. What are you grinning at, you blackgyard? Be asy there. I *mean* protect; but not for nothing, you spalpane, of course. Natur's natur, so one drop of the cratur, and then away to the rescue. Get out of that with your winking."

Two small characters of our *dramatis personæ* we had almost forgotten. We mean pretty little Susan, the housemaid of the Robinsons, and her lover, the smart young man at Mr. Bassevi's, who refused to share in the lying frauds of his rascally employer, and who, by his secret instructions to the police, saved the life of Mr. Staunton. Well, a happy end befell them, and one not uncommon to lovers—they married. He prospered as the

confidential man at a great print-shop in Pall Mall, and about four years ago started on his own account in a little shop in Bedford Street, Covent Garden, that seems likely to flourish.

THE END.

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